THE EMERGENCE OF MONARCHY IN NORTH INDIA

EIGHTH TO FOURTH CENTURIES B.C.

KUMKUM ROY

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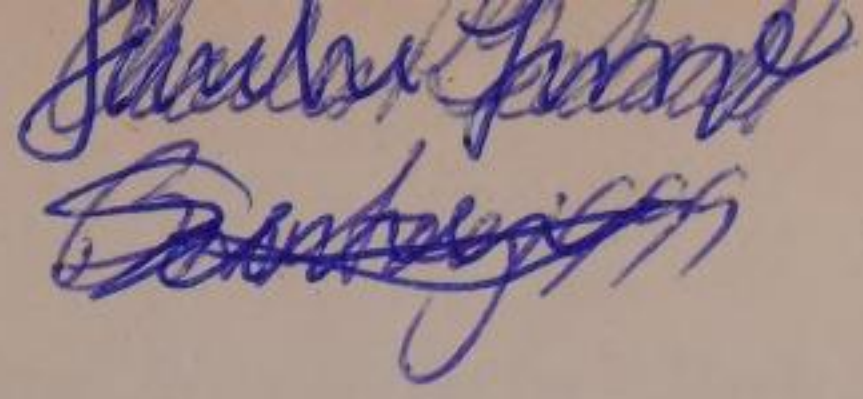
This book explores the institutionalization of relationships of power in early north India. It does this by an analysis of myths, rituals and prescriptions embedded in the brahmanical tradition. Dr Roy argues that monarchy acquires centrality in a situation where contending definitions of power coexist. She traces the problems that are inherent in attempting to valorize a single possibility within such a situation, and the resolutions which are envisaged. In the process, alternative definitions of power relations are analysed in terms of their material, social, and ritual or ideological bases. Thus, monarchy is located within a range of possible power relationships, instead of being viewed as an isolated, unique institution.

On another level, the author focuses on the broader social context, including the growing emphasis on *varna* identities, and on a particular pattern of householding typified by the patriarchal *grah*. She suggests that the relationship between this context and monarchy was a two-way process: while the raja tried to intervene in and control society, more often than not the specific form of such interventions was delimited and constrained by the concerns of dominant social categories. In other words, the emergence of monarchy is viewed not as an imposition from above, but as the result of a complex process of social change.



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To my mother
for her courage, curiosity, and sense of humour

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Abbreviations

AA	Aitareya Āraṇyaka
AB	Aitareya Brāhmaṇa
ADS	Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra
AGS	Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra
ApGS	Āpastamba Gṛhya Sūtra
ApSS	Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra
ASS	Āśvalāyana Śrauta Sūtra
AV	Atharva Veda
BAU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
BDS	Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra
BSS	Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra
CU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
GDS	Gautama Dharma Sūtra
IED	A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages
JB	Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa
KGS	Khādira Gṛhya Sūtra
LSS	Lāṭyāyana Śrauta Sūtra
Mbh	Mahābhārata
PED	The Pali Text Society's Pali English Dictionary
PGS	Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra
PSED	The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary
PVB	Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
Ram	Rāmāyaṇa
RV	Ṛg Veda
SB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
SED	A Sanskrit English Dictionary
SGS	Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra
SSS	Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra
TS	Taittirīya Saṃhitā
VDS	Vāsiṣṭha Dharma Sūtra
VI	Vedic Index

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Chapter One

The Problem and the Context

O grandfather Bhārata, tell me how this word *rājā*, which is so prevalent, originated. (The *rājā*) has hands, head, neck, back, arms, stomach, intellect, and senses, and is as prone to grief and joy as any one of us (and yet) how does he alone protect the entire earth, full of noble and brave men, and why do people desire to earn his favour?

Yudhiṣṭhira to Bhīṣma in the *Śānti Parvan*.

I

The origin and acceptance of monarchy, the problem which intrigued Yudhiṣṭhira, continues to attract the attention of present-day historians. This is partly owing to the recognition of the 'centrality of power and authority in shaping the course of a society' (Saberwal 1984: 2) and the consequent need to identify and analyze institutions through which relations of power and authority are structured in specific societies.[1] In the early Indian context monarchy has by and large been regarded as the ideal political institution[2] in the dominant tradition.[3] I will focus in

[1] The recognition of the exercise of power as legitimate is the distinguishing feature of authority, which is exercised 'most characteristically in a network of clearly defined hierarchical roles' (Peabody 1968: 474).

[2] Other possibilities recognized in early literature include the *gaṇa–saṃghas*, often equated with oligarchies or republics. However, even within the Buddhist tradition, which reflects considerable sympathy for the *gaṇa–saṃghas*, the ideal polity is conceived of not as an oligarchy but as a monarchy under the sway of the *cakkavattin* or universal ruler, as for instance in the Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Suttanta (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1977: 59–76).

[3] The dominant tradition is manifested through a range of media. For instance, with reference to the spread of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Thapar (1980: 664–665) observes: 'It is significant that the rendering of the text into regional languages tends to coincide with the establishment of strong monarchical kingdoms on

particular on the emergence of monarchy in north India from *c* eighth to fourth centuries BC.

The significance of the area and period under consideration is widely recognized (e.g. Thapar 1984) and it is well-established that important changes occurred within the time-space framework outlined above. These include the growing importance of settled agriculture associated with the use of iron tools.[4] It has been observed that 'fixed settlement traps people into living with each other, co-operating and devising complex forms of social organization. The metaphor of a *cage* is appropriate' (Mann 1986: 42, italics original). However, the nature of the social organization which emerges is likely to vary substantially according to the specificities of each situation. For instance, the cultivation of small plots by households may lead to the emergence of peasant proprietors whereas more extensive cultivation requiring social cooperation may

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an extensive scale in the same areas. The translations therefore, apart from the religious message of propagating the cult of Vishnu, were also a subtle means of eulogizing the monarchical state'. This is not surprising, given the 'centrality of the ruler to orderly society' (Brockington 1984: 124) reflected in the epic.

[4] The importance of iron technology in stimulating historical change has been variously assessed. According to Chakrabarti (1985: 84): 'the beginning of iron was a slow process and unlikely to have led to what has been called the "second urbanization" in the Gangetic valley'. A. Ghosh (1973: 10), while agreeing that 'the metal did not produce any spurt in the material prosperity of the society', points out that this was, nonetheless, 'the period when political *janapadas* were being formed (ibid.)', indicating the contemporaneity of the two developments, although denying any processual links between the two. Such connections have been emphasized by Kosambi (1956: 147) who linked the rise of Magadha to its 'near monopoly over the main source of contemporary power, the metals'. More recently, R.S. Sharma (1983a: 105) focuses on the wide-ranging implications and possibilities inherent in the use of iron technology. Broadly, he associates the use of iron with the development and intensification of agriculture in the Ganga valley. This was made possible through the use of iron axes for clearing the dense forests of the region, thus permitting the extension of the area under cultivation, and through the development of the iron ploughshare, especially useful for ploughing the heavy alluvial soil of the area effectively. The possibility of agricultural expansion thus opened up is thought to have provided the basis for a wide range of socio-political changes, including social stratification, the emergence of the state and the growth of urban centres.

prevent the development of exclusive ownership (ibid.: 51). While iron technology in itself did not 'cause' socio-political transformation, it opened up possibilities which were exploited within a specific historical context. The archaeological evidence also indicates a remarkable increase in the number of settlements, reflecting significant demographical changes.[5] This was possibly accompanied by a growing interaction among the inhabitants of the area, apparent in the spread of the PGW through the Ganga-Yamuna doab and beyond. The PGW has been recovered from as many as 650 sites (Makkhan Lal 1984: 55). While in many cases the PGW level marks the beginning of the settlement, it is also found stratified above the levels of the late Harappan (e.g. Alamgirpur), Ochre Coloured Pottery (e.g. Hastinapur), and Black and Red Ware (e.g. Atranjikhera) (ibid.: 57). Each of these cultures was associated with distinctive subsistence strategies[6] and specific socio-cultural ideals, the latter being most clearly reflected in the pottery itself. Hence, the spread of the PGW may indicate growing contact amongst the peoples associated with these cultures and the consequent evolution of a composite socio-political structure.[7]

Textual sources, moreover, provide us with a means of under-

[5] This is evident from the data on the Painted Grey Ware (henceforth PGW) culture and the Northern Black Polished Ware (henceforth NBP) culture. In an analysis of the PGW and NBP sites of the Kanpur district, Makkhan Lal (1989: 49) suggests that population may have more than doubled from the first phase to the second (i.e. between *c* 800 and 500 BC) rising from an average of 2.35 per sq km to 6.15 per sq km. At the same time the average distance between settlements decreased from 13 kms to 9 kms.

[6] For instance the evidence from Atranjikhera indicates that rice, barley, gram and khesari were associated with OCP levels, the BRW levels yielded evidence of rice and moong, whereas the PGW levels were associated with rice, wheat and barley (Gaur 1983). Structural remains associated with each level also show important variations (ibid.).

[7] The emergence of a stratified socio-political structure is also evident in the distribution of the PGW vis-a-vis other pottery types. It has been estimated that the PGW constitutes between three and ten per cent of the entire pottery assemblage at any given site (Makkhan Lal 1984: 57). Given the fact that this was a deluxe ware and that the PGW shapes were replicated in other coarser fabrics, it is evident that there were socio-economic and political differences among those who made and/or used different types of pottery.

standing this and related processes.[8] Amongst the crucial changes discernible are the 'transition to class society and state formation' (R.S. Sharma 1983b: 34) related to which was a changing definition of power which 'became less an instrumental value (viewed from the perspective of the collectivity as a whole) and, increasingly an end in itself, the basis of a hierarchy of privilege' (Drekmeier 1962: 93). These changes were reflected initially in the development of an elaborate sacrificial ritual (Ghoshal 1966b: 21) which gradually gave way to a multi-layered system of legitimation.

Scholars analyzing the emergence of monarchy in this context have long been aware of its complex nature. As Law (1960: 94) pointed out:

> The 'rise of kingship' being a single expression does not in a strict logical sense stand for a single effect from a single cause. It is a general expression for several phenomena which from the logical standpoint are different and attributable to different totalities of conditions.

However, if the problem is complex, it is also true that it has been studied in detail by a number of historians over the past century or so.

Modern (late nineteenth and twentieth century) studies of the early Indian polity have, to a great extent, been related to the contemporary socio-political context, as has been recognized by R.S. Sharma (1991: 1) and Thapar (1978: 1–25). Sharma in fact specifically suggests that the post-1857 period witnessed the beginning of serious investigations into India's past as the British felt the need to know more about their subjects on the assumption that ignorance in this respect had contributed to the upsurge of 1857. More generally, the context from which such studies emerged was one of colonialism.

Western scholarship on India may be broadly divided into two strands (Thapar 1978) typified by the Orientalists and Utilitarians respectively. The former is possibly best represented by Max Müller,

[8] These are in fact 'topics on which archaeology is most reticent, such as religious beliefs and political ideas' (Allchin and Allchin 1983: 316). This is not to deny the potential of archaeology to answer such questions, evident in recent studies (e.g. Brumfiel 1989: 132, Kus 1989: 152, Miller 1989: 76).

who romanticized certain aspects of the past, especially those associated with the 'pristine Aryan civilization'. While this was to a certain extent detrimental, as an idealized picture of the past gained widespread currency, Max Müller also contributed substantially by editing and translating numerous Sanskrit texts, leading to a dissemination of information about sources available for historical studies.

If the Orientalists treated some aspects of India's past with a certain amount of respect, the Utilitarian approach as exemplified in the work of Mill (1858) was one of criticism and contempt. The reconstruction of the past which emerged from the perspective, very often as inaccurate as the Orientalist version, was extremely powerful, as it served an obvious political purpose in justifying the imposition of British rule—if India's past was dismal, the British could justifiably be proud of shouldering the 'white man's burden' and 'civilizing' those entrusted to their custody.[9]

Neither of these approaches was strictly speaking historical, as both used data from Indian history (often rather uncritically) in order to prove a point, rather than to arrive at an understanding of the past. Further, both tended to ignore or minimize, for different reasons, the existence of political institutions in early India. Thus, Max Müller (1968: 31), in an attempt to idealize the past, wrote:

> The Hindus were a nation of philosophers. Their struggles were the struggles of thought: their past, the problem of creation; their future, the problem of existence . . . It might therefore be justly said that India has no place in the political history of the world.

From a different perspective, Mill (1858: 117) argued that Hindu culture and civilization were worthless and static.

> It is within this intellectual background that the earliest modern

[9] This is not to deny that the Orientalist perspective was also related to the contemporary socio-political situation. Orientalists such as Jones undertook the study of Indian languages to cope with the practical problems of governing an alien people, while less hard-headed scholars such as Max Müller often tended to glorify early Indian institutions as a reaction to the contemporary situation in Europe, somewhat inadvertently contributing to the myth of the Aryan race in the process.

Indian writing on the theme has to be viewed.[10] The very approach of focusing on early Indian political ideas and institutions marked a crucial breakthrough, opening up a new area of investigation which had hitherto been ignored. This was obviously, and very often explicitly, linked to the emergence of the national movement (R.S. Sharma 1991: 3)—for instance, Altekar (1962: iv), in the preface to the first edition of *State and Government in Ancient India*, which appeared in 1949, hoped that his work would provide 'lessons for the present', that is, for the Indian government of the post-Independence era.

Another significant development was that most of the scholars working within this tradition posited the existence of a golden age in the remote past, and implicitly or explicitly grappled with the notion of historical change. Very often, changes were simply documented rather than explained (e.g. Altekar 1962: 309). Nevertheless, this was a useful corrective to the western view of India's past as static and unchanging.

The new approach also resulted in the revaluation and systematization of an enormous amount of textual data, laying the basis for later works on the theme. This led to a search for old manuscripts, and to the discovery of the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya in 1905, which has been described as 'an epoch-making event in the history of the study of ancient Indian polity' (R.S. Sharma 1991: 4). In a sense, nationalist scholars were following in the footsteps of the Orientalists, but at the same time, by re-examining Sanskrit texts, and by discovering new sources, they were offering a successful challenge to the Orientalist notion of an unchanging, idyllic past.

The close relationship between the national movement and historians, which was in a sense inevitable given the role of the urban intelligentsia in the former (R.S. Sharma 1991: 4) was thus, to a certain extent, fruitful. Nevertheless, it created problems as well. These were partly related to the fact that many of these works

[10] For the present purpose, I have grouped both pre-Independence and post-Independence nationalist writers in a single category, owing to the common perspective which underlies their works. Besides, I have attempted to provide an illustrative rather than an exhaustive survey.

(e.g. Ghoshal 1966b: 9–13, Bhandarkar 1963) were in the nature of a reaction to western conceptions about Indian political institutions or the lack of them. While the critique offered was often valid, it was limited by the fact that Indian scholars attempted to challenge individual elements of western historical (or ahistorical) constructions, rather than question the entire framework. For instance, Ghoshal (ibid.) challenges Bloomfield's (1972: 4–5) notion that the institution of *āśramas* made men indifferent to political and social developments, but does not attempt to contextualize the evolution of the institution and develop an alternative analysis of it.

More pernicious was the tendency to eulogize the past. In part this was an understandable reaction to Utilitarian attempts to devalue it, but the misuse of historical data for ideological purposes once again contributed to preventing the development of a more objective historical understanding.

Attempts to glorify the past very often postulated the existence of an independent Indian intellectual tradition (Ghoshal 1966b: 3), an idea which was occasionally expressed in communal or racist terms (e.g. Jayaswal 1943: 3). As a consequence, the explanations offered for the emergence of political ideas and institutions often border on the mystical, being attributed in some instances to the 'essential genius' of Indians (Ghoshal 1966b: 3).

Very often, moreover, explanations tended to degenerate into apologies or justifications. This was especially true where institutions which did not appear desirable from the present perspective were discovered. Such apologies often took the form of pointing out similar developments in the west. For instance, in discussing the emergence of monarchy in early India, Altekar (1962: 377) finds comfort in the fact that 'this phenomenon was not peculiar to ancient India; it repeated itself in ancient Europe also, where we find the republics in Greece and Italy being gradually supplanted by monarchies and empires'.

The search for and the creation of a glorious past also occasionally resulted in ahistorical attempts to establish equations between early Indian institutions and nineteenth or twentieth century ones, claiming priority for the former. This led to such absurdities as the discovery of the concept of the welfare state in the Smṛtis (Ghoshal

1966b: 4) and the description of early Hindu kingship as national (Jayaswal 1943: 220). Such unjustified claims unfortunately vitiated serious scholarship.

Inevitably, the attempts to establish the priority of Indian institutions resulted in a certain amount of analytical confusion, as early, and probably specifically Indian concepts were reduced to what were regarded as their western equivalents. This is reflected in the virtually uniform translation of the term *rājā*[11] as king and *rājya* as kingdom (e.g. Ghoshal 1966b: 20) irrespective of context, ignoring changes in the significance of such terms which emerge when reductionist tendencies are avoided.

Despite its limitations, the nationalist historiographical tradition proved extremely influential, as is clear from an examination of post-independence, source-based studies of the Brāhmaṇas and Śrauta Sūtras (e.g. Basu 1969, R.N. Sharma 1977, Ram Gopal 1983). Such works exemplify both the strengths and the weaknesses of this tradition. On the one hand, they are extremely informative and descriptive, collating extant textual evidence, but on the other hand, they tend to idealize and decontextualize the past. Thus, in his search for modern equivalents, Basu (1969: xxix) equates the *purohita* with the Prime Minister.

At a more general level, the tendency to idealize the past is also evident in the notion that there was 'complete social harmony among the four constituents of the then existing society'. (R.N. Sharma 1977: 57). If this was indeed the case, there would have been no need to devise rites by means of which the *brahma* and the *kṣatra* could dominate the *viś* and occasionally the *śūdra*.[12] Similarly, the evidence of tension which is often explicit in the brahmanical tradition is glossed over. For example, political institutions and relations are specifically idealized, some authors arguing for the existence of cordiality between the ruler and ruled (e.g. Basu 1969: xxix).

[11] Apart from the term *rājā*, *brahma*, *dharma* and *karma* which are commonly used in English in the nominative form, I will use the unconjugated stems for other Sanskrit terms, except where entire phrases are cited.

[12] Examples of such rituals are discussed in subsequent chapters.

While such approaches have been of limited value, recent decades have witnessed a fruitful exploration of alternative possibilities, both in India and the west. Western scholarship has been enriched through the sociological and anthropological insights of scholars such as Drekmeier (1962) and Dumont (1970) on the one hand, and the linguistic studies of Heesterman (1957) and Gonda (1969) on the other. To a certain extent, such works continue the earlier orientalist tradition of attempting to learn from the east.[13] For Drekmeier (1962: 2) for example:

> A knowledge of primitive cultures and ancient civilizations is of particular value in focusing our attention on the significance of myth in giving meaning and purpose to life, in explaining the fact of death and catastrophe, and in holding groups of men together.

Nevertheless, Drekmeier (ibid.) does recognize the need to locate religious and political ideas and institutions within a socio-economic context, although he points out the problem inherent in establishing a simplistic connection between the two.

The second theme which runs through many of these works is an attempt to 'see the world through the eyes of the Vedic Indian himself' (Heesterman 1957: 5). While the problems of this are recognized (e.g. Drekmeier 1962: 4), the perspective is valuable in at least consciously eschewing tendencies to use the past to argue about the present. Nevertheless, the idea of turning to the east in search of answers to fundamental questions of human existence often condition such reconstructions both in terms of the data selected for analysis and in terms of the interpretations offered.

Heesterman's (1957) analysis of the *rājasūya* (one of the major rituals legitimizing rulership) illustrates some of these tendencies. According to him, the *rājasūya* represents the re-enactment of a cosmic drama, of 'birth and death, integration and disintegration, ascension and descent' (ibid.: 6). While such an analysis may have a certain validity, given the fact that a complex ritual such as the

[13] In fact, such scholarship has been characterized as neo-orientalist (R.S. Sharma 1991: xxvi).

rājasūya operated at a number of levels, the constant search for symbols of cosmic regeneration makes Heesterman's study somewhat tedious and lopsided, and the social context, which is often explicitly manipulated in the course of the sacrifice, is ignored. Besides, some of these works (e.g. Gonda 1969, Dumont 1970) tend to be ahistorical, sometimes explicitly so.

Despite these limitations, such works have been valuable in recognizing the significance of the dominant religious/ritual tradition in early Indian history. This revaluation is particularly useful because it opens up new possibilities of exploring the tradition as a whole, instead of using data from it to argue for or against various positions.

Attempts to evolve alternative, specifically historical approaches by Indian scholars have also proved to be extremely fruitful. Two outstanding contributions to the analysis of the theme have been by R.S. Sharma (1989, 1991) and Thapar (1984). Both historians locate the emergence and development of political institutions within what is viewed as a changing socio-economic context, of, broadly speaking, greater differentiation. This perspective marks a fundamental, conscious break with the earlier historiographical tradition in attempting to understand the past as a dynamic rather than as a static system. Further, methodologically, the earlier dependence on textual analysis has been substantially modified by the use of anthropological, sociological, and above all, archaeological tools and data. As a result, our understanding of early Indian political processes has been considerably enriched. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the social context remain relatively unexplored. These pertain in particular to issues such as kinship and gender. Recent ethno-historical studies (e.g. Gailey 1987) point to the existence of certain crucial links between changes in the kinship structure and the emergence of kingship, related to the growing demands on the produce of kin communities to meet the requirements of the state machinery. The examination of such possibilities is useful in providing insight into the context of political processes. It also enables us to focus on the links between the emergence of the state and changes in the economy and gender and kinship relationships, formulated by Engels (1884/1972) over a century

ago.[14] These possibilities have been explored, refined, and occasionally challenged in the context of early civilizations such as Mesopotamia (Rohrlich 1980, Lerner 1986) and in Gailey's (1987) study of Tonga.[15]

Related in part to this shift in focus of political analyses, at another level, the last decade in particular has witnessed a number of attempts to analyze the nature of power and define domination, sharpening our understanding of political processes. This is evident, for instance, in the notion of power as implying a dynamic relationship between the dominant and the dominated (Miller 1989: 64). Specifically, people who have either willingly or unwillingly surrendered power to leaders retain, in most situations, some option of either withdrawing these powers or of moving away from the spheres of power which emerge (Mann 1986: 67). The complex nature of power is also suggested by the identification of four sources of social power: ideological, economic, military, and political (Mann 1986: 6).[16] The fact that control of these four sources need not coincide contributes to the process of historical change.[17] In any given situation, moreover, power includes 'distributive and

[14] The links Engels envisaged were complex, attempting 'to relate men and women, town and country, kinship and state, forms of property, systems of land tenure, convertibility of wealth, forms of exchange, the technology of food production, and forms of trade, to name a few, into a systematic historical account' (Rubin 1975: 210).

[15] More general critiques of Engels's work are available in Sacks (1975), Lane (1976) and Bloch (1985).

[16] Runciman's (1982: 361) definition of power is somewhat similar: 'The powers of any and all rulers derive from some combination of (1) possession of or control over the sources and distribution of wealth and therewith the ability to offer or withhold the means of subsistence, (2) attribution by subjects and/or fellow-citizens of superior honour or prestige whether deriving from sacred or secular personal or institutional charisma, and therewith the ability to attract and retain a following, and (3) command of the technical and organizational means of physical coercion and therewith the ability to impose obedience by force.'

[17] For instance, Mann (1986: 67) points out that 'elites have rarely been unitary. Elders, lineage heads, bigmen, and chiefs have possessed overlapping, competitive authorities, viewed one another suspiciously . . . '.

collective, exploitative and functional' elements (Mann 1986: 6).[18] Besides, power may appear as either authoritative power operating through definite commands, requiring conscious obedience, or as diffused power which 'typically comprises, not command and obedience, but an understanding that these practices are natural or moral or result from self-evident common interest' (ibid.: 8) or as a combination of both elements. There has also been a growing awareness of the fact that power 'is an aspect of nearly all social relationships' and that politics refers to 'the distribution, maintenance, and the exercise of and struggle for power within a social unit' (Cohen 1979: 85).

At the same time, there has been a growing interest in the means of communication, so essential for the effective exercise of power.[19] Such analyses of power relations have led to a re-examination of the nature of institutions such as the family, widely recognized as constituting an important locus for social reproduction.[20] Clearly, the nature and process of social reproduction, the personnel involved and their relationships require analysis. This can provide us with an understanding of how power relations are enforced or contested in the day-to-day lives of men and women in the context of institutions such as kinship.

However, most scholars who have focused on the emergence of political institutions in early India have avoided discussing such connections. Very few historians consider it even worth their while

[18] Distributive power refers to the uneven distribution of power within social networks, where power benefits some as opposed to others, whereas collective power, as its very name suggests, refers to the power exercised by all participants in such relations.

[19] As Mann (1986: 136) observes, 'without effective passing of messages, personnel, and resources, there can be no power'.

[20] Social reproduction 'includes not only the reproduction of the labour force through birth or acquisition, but also maintenance activities, socialization, and the replication of the ideological and political means of ensuring the continuation of class domination' (Gailey and Patterson 1988: 78). Even in non-stratified societies, 'the concept of reproduction . . . must weld eight elements—the production, consumption, distribution and exchange of things on the one hand; the production, consumption, distribution and exchange of people on the other—into a structural whole' (Gregory 1982: 30).

to discuss the gendered nature of political roles, the exclusion of women from positions of power, including kingship, and its significance. One of the few historians to refer in passing to the fact that women were debarred from exercising political authority, Anjaria (1935: 225), states that: 'Besides the lower classes in society . . . women were also debarred from the privilege (or shall we call it the duty?) of interesting themselves and sharing in the tasks of government'. Even when there is evidence for the involvement of women in explicitly politico-ritual processes, very little effort is made to understand the significance of their role or any changes this underwent. This is inevitable, given the reluctance to recognize, let alone analyze, the participation of women in such processes. For instance, in the context of the *ratnīnāmhavīṃśi*, which forms a part of the *rājasūya*, Ghoshal (1957: 306) observes that '*we have . . . no other choice than to accept* the position that the chief queen and other queens occupied a high official position in the Vedic state' (italics mine). R.S. Sharma (1991: 158) is clearly somewhat exceptional in attempting to analyze their position, suggesting that their participation represents the survival of tribal, matriarchal elements, which were absorbed within a patriarchal framework. Nevertheless, the development of gender stratification and the changes in the kinship structure in the context of the institutionalization of power relations have not been systematically explored.

II

The need for a fresh examination of some aspects of the emergence of political authority, specifically monarchy in north India, is, to a certain extent, interwoven with the specific nature of the textual sources I propose to utilize for the purpose. These include the principal Brāhmaṇas, Upaniṣads and Śrauta Sūtras, supplemented with the earlier *Ṛg Veda* and the later Gṛhya Sūtras and Dharma Sūtras.

The Brāhmaṇas are amongst the earliest prose works available in Sanskrit. Winternitz (1981: 174–175) observes that the 'word "Brāhmaṇa" (neutral) means primarily an "explanation or expres-

sion of a learned priest . . . on some point of the ritual". Used collectively this word denotes then a collection of such pronouncements and discussions of the priests of the science of sacrifice'.[21] While the basic aim was to 'connect the sacrificial formulae and songs with rituals' (Sastry 1968: 240), they incorporate a wide range of related material as well. These include speculation on the *mantras* or chants and theological and philosophical material, including the beginnings of Upanisadic literature, and discussions on grammar, etymology and the use of various metres (Basu 1969: ii, Macdonell 1972: 204). However, 'the practically all-powerful sacrificial (*śrauta*) rites are the one and only theme from which all discussions start and on which everything including the secondary themes hinges', (Gonda 1975: 339). I would suggest that this position of centrality which is assigned to the sacrifice is of chronological significance as well, as the sacrifice, in particular the major *śrauta* sacrifices (those based on what was regarded as divinely revealed tradition), acquire significance during a particular phase in the brahmanical tradition and later decline in importance.

The composition of the *sūtras* marks the beginning of a new phase in the brahmanical tradition. The word *sūtra* literally means thread. This term is used to denote both the complete work as well as the sentences and paragraphs which go into its composition, on the analogy of weaving (Gonda 1977: 465). The typical characteristic of the mature *sūtra* works is the compression of as much information and as many instructions in as few words as possible. This characteristic is less evident in earlier works, which contain Brāhmaṇa-like passages, whereas in later works, the tendency to save even half a syllable is more marked. The *sūtra* style was employed in a number of compositions, both religious and secular.

The Śrauta Sūtras deal, as their name suggests, with the *śrauta* ritual. However, the texts themselves were not considered as revealed, but were ascribed to *sūtrakāras*, literally the makers of *sūtras*, human authors, often 'shadowy figures' (Gonda 1977: 475).

As both the Śrauta Sūtras and the Brāhmaṇas were explicitly

[21] Gonda (1975: 341) however suggests that they were so-called because they ' "comment upon *brahman* " i.e. the Veda'.

concerned with Vedic ritual, they are, in a sense, complementary. In fact, 'the Brāhmaṇas and the Śrauta Sūtras discuss the same liturgy but from entirely different angles' (Gonda 1977: 497); the purpose of the Śrauta Sūtras being to present a 'systematic description of every ritual in its natural sequence' (ibid.) while the Brāhmaṇas are devoted to explanations of controversial injunctions.

At the same time, the priority of the Brāhmaṇas vis-a-vis the Śrauta Sūtras is evident from the fact that 'no Sūtra is ever quoted in any of the Brāhmaṇas, but there is no collection of Sūtras in which the various Śākhās of the Brāhmaṇas are not referred to by name' (Max Müller 1968: 172). However, it is likely that the earliest *sūtra* works are more or less contemporary with the latest Brāhmaṇas.

According to a number of scholars (Max Müller 1968: 230–32, Drekmeier 1962: 35, Macdonell 1972: 246, B.K. Ghosh 1942: 219) *sūtras* were produced as part of the brahmanical reaction to the emergence of Buddhism. However, while the rise of Buddhism may have stimulated discussion on certain issues such as asceticism, it does not explain the composition of *sūtra* literature as such very adequately.

An alternative explanation (Winternitz 1981: 250, Gonda 1977: 465, Ram Gopal 1983: 1) suggests that the *sūtras* arose out of a need to systematize a 'growing mass of details preserved in circles of specialists in some branch of traditional knowledge' (Gonda 1977: 465) for practical purposes in order to facilitate memorization. This view seems to be plausible in the context of an oral tradition.

Each category of texts is associated with specific, typical characteristics. Nevertheless, considered collectively, they possess a certain unity as well. As they are all part of the brahmanical tradition, they share certain common assumptions, although the form in which these assumptions are articulated may vary. To cite an elementary example of this, the texts uniformly assume that members of the *brāhmaṇa varṇa* are superior to those of other *varṇas*. However, while considerable emphasis is laid on the ritual status of the *brāhmaṇas* in the Brāhmaṇas, the Dharma Sūtras incorporate more comprehensive claims to economic and legal privileges. This un-

derlying stratum of common beliefs running through the texts facilitates comparison.

Second, these texts were conceived of, to a great extent, as instruments with which to influence, control, direct and understand some of the processes we will be examining, providing for the institutionalization of ideas relating to power.[22] At one level, brahmanical literature served 'to continue older values, to validate new values' (R.S. Sharma 1983b: 67). At another level, it represents an attempt to constitute a system based on a *'metaphysico-ethical rationalization'*; the aim of which was to 'understand the world as a "meaningful cosmos" . . . (and) to take a consistent and unified stance towards it' (Schlucter 1979: 15, italics original). In particular, much of what is prescribed in the texts was expected to legitimize many of the significant changes which were occurring. The importance of legitimation for the emergence of political authority cannot be overemphasized. Legitimation gives both those who are governed and those who govern the feeling that government has a right to govern (Sternberger 1968: 244). In fact, 'ideological representations are integral to relations of power and control' (Bender 1989: 93). Hence the forms of legitimation used and their changes acquire significance.

Brahmanical literature is particularly and obviously concerned with religious legitimation. This takes a variety of forms, including belief in the divinity of the ruler, in the divine nature of kingship and other political institutions, or in the divine vocation of the ruler. However, to adopt any one of the forms to the exclusion of the others is necessarily restrictive. Further, any emphasis on the divine character of the ruler alone would widen the disjunction between the ruler and the ruled, whereas for legitimation to be successful, it is necessary to focus on both the conjunction and the disjunction between the ruler and ruled. The brahmanical tradition recognizes this problem and tries to overcome it by widening the basis of monarchy, relating it to other emerging social hierarchies on the one hand, and relating these hierarchies to one another on

[22] As Saberwal (1983: 30) observes, ideas are much more effective when they are institutionalized rather than when they exist as abstract ideas.

the other.[23] Thus an attempt was made to arrive at an interrelated whole, with the ruler as a focus of unity.

In a sense then, the texts illustrate the creation or evolution of what Berger (1969: 53) characterizes as a theodicy, that is a means of explaining or justifying phenomena in terms of religious beliefs (ibid.: 59): 'Theodicies may serve as legitimations *both* for the powerful *and* the powerless, for the privileged *and* the deprived . . . In both cases, the result is one of world-maintenance and, very concretely, of the maintenance of a particular institutional order' (italics original).

Features which characterize a theodicy very often include a tendency to 'discover' parallels between the divine and the human worlds. This is explicitly recognized in the notion of 'men being after the manner of gods' (Eggeling 1963d: 160–61, SB 9.1.1.19). Such parallels endow human institutions with an element of immortality (Berger 1969: 38). Further, religious legitimation attempts to locate the present moment within past traditions. Such history may be fictitious, but nonetheless, it is real for those who participate in its creation or recreation through ritual (ibid.: 41). As such, the relationship between religious legitimation and the socio-political structures or institutions which are legitimated is crucial.[24] Sanctity, in fact, very often serves 'to transform the arbitrary into the necessary, and to portray to the individual the needs and interests of society and his/her own needs' (Knapp 1988: 162).[25]

Legitimation, moreover, is necessary only in a situation where the facticity of the social order is challenged (Berger 1969: 31), and is essential both as an offensive mechanism against those who challenge the system and as a means of defence to strengthen the beliefs of those who attempt to uphold it. Hence, legitimation is a dynamic process, reflected, to a certain extent, in the brahmanical tradition.

[23] In fact, 'the hierarchical ordering of society lies at the very basis of the Hindu state' (Anjaria 1935: 210).

[24] Berger (1969: 48) also argues that in some cases the religious tradition may assume a certain autonomy in relation to social processes.

[25] Very often, ideologies codify social relations 'as grounded in the essence of the universe—in the nature of nature, the nature of human nature, and the nature of society' (Wolf 1982: 389).

It is likely that in most early societies ritual constituted one of the most important mechanisms of legitimation (Bloch 1989: 122). To be effective, moreover, rituals are primarily communicative in nature. 'Ritual action . . . serves to express the status of the actor vis-a-vis his environment, both physical and social; it may also serve to alter the status of the actor. When ritual functions in the latter sense, it is a manifestation of power' (Leach 1968: 525–526).

It has been suggested (Turner 1969: 10) that in certain situations there may be a correlation between 'a multiplicity of conflict situations' and a 'high frequency of ritual performance', and in fact, many of the rituals discussed grapple with problems of social and political hierarchy, attempting to evolve a degree of uniformity which would have been relevant only in a situation where such hierarchies in general or the specific ordering within a particular hierarchy was challenged.

Much of the ritual literature focuses on the use and meanings of symbols. Each such symbol can be interpreted at a variety of levels ranging from the social and moral to the physiological 'proclaiming their ultimate religious unity, over and above the conflicts between and within these orders' (Turner 1969: 52). To deal adequately with the entire range of meanings embedded in such symbols is obviously beyond the scope of the present work. Nevertheless, I will focus on certain important symbolic equations and connections which unify the values communicated through a wide range of rituals.

The brahmanical texts explicitly operate at a number of levels, each of which is, to a certain extent, idealized. The first level is that of the gods, and while it is recognized that divine and human institutions should ideally be identical, it is evident that there were discrepancies which were often resolved or concealed. This level, and the problems posed by it are best exemplified by myths, which, once developed and embedded within the tradition, seem to have been difficult to eradicate. Hence, when such myths were no longer considered appropriate in a changed situation, they were often modified or reinterpreted with considerable dexterity.

Second, we have an intermediate ritual level, where gods and men are brought into contact with one another. This level was also

subject to change. The very significance of specific rituals varies over time, the deities associated with a particular sacrifice change, and the ritual itself becomes more or less complex. Given the use of rituals as a means of social communication, such changes are obviously significant, indicating as they do, shifts in both the message and the medium.

The third level, which is discernible from incidental references, is a mundane human level. While attempts are made to bring these strands into harmony with one another, there are divergences. Further, as noted above, changes are discernible within each level. In other words, the brahmanical tradition is one which evolves dynamically, and as such, is relevant for any analysis of historical change.[26]

It is likely that the changes discernible in the tradition reflect a tendency inherent in the relationship between ideology and power, economic, social, or political which

> is expressed not only in the manner in which elites or other special interest groups utilize religious ideology to establish, challenge, or change a specific social order, but also in the sense in which power establishes 'religious' personalities, authorizes specific religious practices and their insignia, defines what is to be believed, and in fact constructs religious ideology (Knapp 1988: 172).

At another level, the changes within the tradition probably relate to the fundamental problem of defining meanings (Wolf 1982: 388) and enforcing such definitions—a problem which confronts any ideological construction. The definition of meanings implies both laying down categories through which reality is to be perceived and denying the existence of alternatives (ibid.). Once defined, moreover, meanings need to be defended and preserved through constant reiteration or the 'development of redundancy' (ibid.).

[26] In many cases, the authors themselves are aware of such changes. For instance, the ADS (2.6.13.7,8) states that *dharmavyatikrama* or deviation from *dharma* may be observed amongst one's ancestors, but such deviance did not amount to sin in their case as they possessed *tejas* (splendour, brilliance). This would imply changing norms, or a sharper definition of norms and an awareness of changed circumstances.

Within the brahmanical tradition, redundancy often manifests itself in the reiteration of certain basic ideals in a variety of forms through a wide range of ritual and non-ritual practices and prescriptions.

The possibilities of developing alternative categories of perception nonetheless remained as a constant challenge and gave rise to another tendency within the tradition, viz., a widening and to a certain extent shifting of the definition of the sacred, accompanied by a consistent attempt to assert brahmanical control over such definitions. This led, for example, to the brahmanization of a variety of rituals and to the incorporation of mystic insight within the definition of the sacred.

This extension, however, did not involve the simple incorporation of new rituals or institutions such as asceticism, but was a more complex process in which such beliefs were adapted, modified and assigned a specific place within the entire scheme of affairs. Thus, to a certain extent, the dynamism evident within the brahmanical tradition was the result of attempts to counter alternative traditions—either the practices of groups which were outside the sphere of influence of the *brāhmaṇas* or of groups which were within this sphere but attempted, nonetheless, to break away from it.[27]

While the texts are clearly related to important historical processes, they suffer from certain limitations as well. These stem primarily from their prescriptive nature, which has led to speculation (e.g. Drekmeier 1962: 6) on the extent to which the prescriptions were actually effective. The problem has two related dimensions—one pertaining to the actual performance of the rituals prescribed in the texts, and the second, more complex, of determining the extent to which the rituals, if performed, were effective in communicating the values which were central to the tradition.

To start with the question of performance—Buddhist literature provides us with a range of evidence suggesting familiarity with a

[27] While political leaders may find the formalization inherent in the ritualization of power advantageous, as it confers a certain invulnerability on their position, ritualization, by formalizing relations may, at the same time, restrict their freedom of manipulation (Bloch 1989: 29). Hence, the use of rituals for political ends is marked by an element of tension.

variety of brahmanical rituals. These include major sacrifices such as the *assamedha* (*aśvamedha*), *purisamedha* (*puruṣamedha*), *samñā-pāsa*(?) and *vāchapeya* (*vājapeya*) (Barua 1956: 87–108).

Buddhist sources also refer to the four major categories of priests associated with the ritual, viz., the *hotṛ*, *udgātṛ*, *adhvaryu* and *brāhmaṇa*. Further, the *pañcabali* (five offerings) of the Buddhists, consisting of offerings to the *ñāti* (*jñāti* or kinsman), *atithi* (guest), *pubbapeta* (spirit of the ancestor), *rājā* and *devatā* (divine being), are somewhat similar to the *pañcamahāyajñas* (five great sacrifices) prescribed in the brahmanical tradition, consisting of offerings to the *devas* (gods), *bhūtas* (beings), *pitṛs* (patrilineal ancestors), *brahma* (the priestly category) and *manusyas* (men). Besides, *saṃskāras*, rites of passage, continued to be performed even by lay Buddhists (U. Chakravarti 1987: 63). The Pali canon also provides evidence for the prevalence of minor brahmanical rites (Wagle 1968: 363–372).[28]

If the performance of rituals is thus well-attested to, its impact remains to be assessed. Given the communicative nature of rituals, the impact would in all likelihood vary in accordance with the social categories involved. Such involvement must be understood in terms of the inclusion or the explicit exclusion of specific categories, and in terms of the differential roles assigned to participants within the ritual. Obviously, the message communicated to each category would have been different.[29]

More important is the argument that rituals and the message communicated through them are by no means synonymous with the entire cognitive system of a particular society (Bloch 1989: viii). In fact, ritual cognition may provide an alternative to everyday cognition (ibid.). In the early Indian context, it is evident that there were other mechanisms of communication and perception and that the values incorporated within the brahmanical tradition were not

[28] Early medieval inscriptions also refer to the performance of various sacrifices (Pathak 1960: 218–230).

[29] For instance, 'dominant class ideologies and ritual practices may neither be shared by the state's subjects nor even be "understood" by them in any sense besides that of signifying power difference and making power differentiation meaningful' (Gledhill 1988: 9).

the only ones prevalent.[30] However, the very changes within the brahmanical tradition suggest that attempts were constantly made to meet such possibilities and to construct, validate and propagate changing perceptions of social reality and social ideals.

This is evident, for instance, in the discussion on *varṇa*, commonly regarded as one of the basic features of the brahmanical scheme. It has been suggested that Pali texts do not support the view that the position of the *brāhmaṇa* was one of privilege in the eyes of the law, some Jātaka stories referring specifically to the execution of *brāhmaṇas* (Ganguly 1927: 92).

Buddhist evidence has also been used to argue that the *varṇa* hierarchy as a whole represented a theoretical construct with only limited validity in practice (e.g. U. Chakravarti 1987: 104–108). While specific elements of the brahmanical construct of *varṇa* may not have been universally valid (as is in fact recognized by the provision for *āpad-dharma* or modification of prescriptions to meet crises, in the Dharma Sūtras and later literature), it is likely that the broad framework had a wider relevance. Hence, the ideological construct of different groups is presented more often than not in terms of a theme familiar to all, viz., *varṇa*. Besides, in some specific instances, such as that of the *cāṇḍālas*, the descriptions available in Pali literature corroborate the low status assigned to them in prescriptive brahmanical literature (Jha 1975: 21, 1986: 29).

If one views the brahmanical tradition as dynamic rather than static, and as evolving within a context of socio-political transformation, it is possible to utilize it to arrive at an understanding of the changes which were taking place. This is partly related to the unique position of the brahmanical authors vis-a-vis those who exercised explicit political authority. In most situations, there are two aspects of power, viz., power viewed from within, that is from the perspective of the person wielding it, in which sense it may be viewed in positive terms as a desirable attribute, such as ability or

[30] The most outstanding examples of such alternatives are evident from the more or less contemporary Buddhist and Jain traditions. At another level, the distinctive depiction of rituals such as the *rājasūya* and the *aśvamedha* in the epics, which probably incorporate the tradition of the *kṣatriyas* (Pargiter 1962) reflects a different perspective on the common ritual tradition.

skill, and power as experienced by others, from without, who may experience it negatively as domination (Janeway 1975: 103). The *brāhmaṇas* were unique in the sense that they formed part of both spheres—they were closely associated with political power, but at the same time did not directly wield it. This dual perspective provides insights which are particularly valuable.

This is not to deny that this perspective enables us to understand the processes of political change primarily from the point of view of men of the dominant *varṇas*. The ways in which such changes affected men of the lower *varṇas* such as the *vaiśyas* and *śūdras*, and women, and the possible reactions of such groups to these changes are only indirectly refracted in these texts. Information on *śūdras* is, in particular, rather sparse. Thus, there are certain lacunae inherent in the tradition itself. However, an analysis of the tradition with an awareness of these limitations and their possible significance can provide an enriched historical understanding.

III

The word *rājā* occurs as early as the *Ṛg Veda*. However, it is generally recognized that the Vedic term *rājā* is by no means the equivalent of the modern 'king'. In fact, even when the term is translated as 'king' (e.g. VI: s.v.), it is admitted that 'royal power was clearly insecure' and that the word often means no more than 'a "noble of the ruling house" or perhaps even merely a "noble" ' (ibid.).[31] Given such tenuous origins, the need to understand how the term *rājā* changes in significance and becomes synonymous with monarchy or kingship is obvious. At the same time, the process whereby the institution of *rājya* gained acceptance requires analysis.

The most distinctive feature of monarchy as a system of govern-

[31] In Buddhist literature, the term *rājā* is sometimes used in the sense of an elected monarch or nobleman, or a local chieftain or a prince. In the case of the Sākyans and the Koliyans, it was used in the sense of a head of *kulas*, families or clans (PED: s.v.). Such a situation is by no means unique to India. In the early Greek context, for instance, the term *basileus*, used from the Mycenean period onwards, can be translated as king only in the Macedonian period (Runciman 1982: 358).

ment is the concentration of all political power, theoretically at least, in the hands of a single person, almost invariably a man. Further, this man supposedly owes his position to his birth in a particular kingroup and is ideally the eldest son of the previous ruler. To be regarded as legitimate, monarchy then implies a belief that the ruler and his ancestors are unique in relation to other members of society, and a belief that the monarch's existence is vital for the proper functioning of society. While this dual purpose remains common throughout the brahmanical tradition, the forms in which it is manifested vary. To an extent, changes in the forms of legitimation may be related to an inherent contradiction in these underlying premises, seeking to emphasize uniqueness and connectedness respectively. This problem becomes more acute in a situation of growing socio-economic complexity, and partially in response to these, the ideals of rulership and the institutions associated with it change during the period under consideration.

In order to arrive at a better understanding of the emergence of monarchy, we need to view it, first, in the context of the existence/emergence of other positions of status, instead of as a unilinear development. It is likely that the *rājā* consolidated power within the context of a social order where more than one source of power or bases of leadership were available. Second, one can locate the emergence of *rājya* within the context of more or less independent communities which were gradually coming into contact with one another.[32] In the process, attempts were made to coalesce distinct and occasionally divergent institutions of rulership. This is reflected both in the existence of a number of terms indicative of leadership and rulership and in the tendency to associate virtually all these terms with a single *varṇa* category, viz., *rājanya* or *kṣatriya*.

A number of terms are used to indicate positions of importance. Of these, two, the *śreṣṭha* and the *rājā*, are particularly significant. Other terms, less commonly used, include the *adhipati*, *virāj* and *svarāj*. While there is an overlap in the significance of these terms, certain differences emerge from a detailed consideration. Both the

[32] This is also evidenced by the archaeological data referred to earlier.

similarities and the differences are crucial in enabling us to arrive at an understanding of the processes leading to the emergence of monarchy. Further, each term incorporates different, sometimes conflicting, ideals. These may represent the divergent interests of different social categories which were sought to be reconciled. Alternatively, they may reflect the specific ideals/norms associated with different, independent cultures which were gradually encompassed within a unified tradition. These possibilities will be explored for the *śreṣṭha* (Chapter 2), the *adhipati*, *virāj* and *svarāj* (Chapter 3), and the *rājā* (Chapters 4–6).[33]

For each of these terms, the data analyzed pertain to the three levels discernible within the tradition, referred to earlier. However, the proportion of information available from different levels often varies substantially. Such variations are significant in drawing attention to the relative importance and/or vulnerability of specific positions.

The spheres of operation and influence ascribed to each of these personages are defined in terms of social categories, and, less commonly, in terms of a delimited territory. Besides, there is evidence to suggest a changing definition of such spheres.

Within the context thus provided, certain features were crucial in defining these positions. These include the links between the occupants of such positions and the economy, often defined in terms of responsibility for general prosperity. It will be evident that the ability to claim this responsibility was closely linked to demanding a share of the resources of those who were supposed to benefit from it. In other words, the notion of the beneficent chief or ruler was very often used to legitimize economic exactions.

At another level, the incumbents of such positions were often characterized as wealthy. However, the constituents of wealth, the means conceived for acquiring it, and the legitimate or other uses envisaged for such resources were varied. Occasionally, the very

[33] The chapterization does not imply the chronological priority of the emergence of any particular institution. In fact, we will be examining broadly synchronous developments which have been distinguished for purposes of analysis.

processes whereby chiefs or rulers attempted to acquire resources and the uses envisaged for them accelerated socio-economic differentiation.

Definitions of prosperity within the brahmanical tradition very often encompass procreation and fertility. Hence it is not surprising that attempts were made to associate leaders or rulers with procreative processes. More often than not, this was accompanied by a systematic effort to convert women in general and wives in particular into instruments of procreation. At the same time, procreation itself was envisaged as an increasingly complex activity. The social implications of the process require analysis.

Another area of exploration relates to the role of holders of positions of status vis-a-vis socio-political conflicts. Here I will focus on three issues which were evidently regarded as of central importance. These include definitions of *varṇa*, the definition of inter- and intra-generational ties amongst kinsmen, and the definition of gender stratification. Not all chiefs or rulers were conceived of as playing a role vis-a-vis such issues. In fact, these were probably irrelevant for the *virāj* and the early Vedic *rājā*, but were central to the definition of *śraiṣṭhya*, and acquired increasing importance for the later Vedic and post-Vedic *rājā*, *adhipati* and *svarāj*. The involvement with such issues meant, more often than not, supporting certain social categories against others.

The ability to take on such roles was useful in generating social support. At the same time, effective role-playing required the creation of 'administrative' or executive mechanisms. Basic to their development was the ability to acquire, on a more or less systematic basis, the resources necessary to maintain them. This in turn required the forging of links both with the personnel who could assist in the task of appropriation, and with the socio-economic categories from whom resources could be acquired. While this was attempted in the context of both *śraiṣṭhya* and *rājya*, the latter was more successful, probably owing to the intrinsic sacrality associated with the institution. Access to resources permitted the development of other supportive mechanisms of coercion and communication in connection with *rājya*, whereas these were relatively undeveloped for the other terms under consideration.

I will also focus on the means employed for legitimately acquiring such positions, including sacrifices ranging from the relatively simple *soma* sacrifice associated with the *śreṣṭha*, to complicated, composite rituals such as the *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha*, and *vājapeya* associated with the *rājā*.[34] The divine and human participants involved in each ritual and the specific roles assigned to them underscore the socio-political messages communicated through such sacrifices. More generally, the importance of ritual legitimization makes it necessary to focus on the control of definitions of the sacred, and the extent to which this coincides or conflicts with access to positions of status.

The process of ritual legitimation operated on at least two levels—one associated with major, explicitly status-conferring sacrifices such as the *rājasūya*, and another associated with domestic rituals, in the course of which the male head of the household was frequently equated with the *rājā* or, occasionally, the *śreṣṭha*. In fact, as major sacrifices declined in importance, domestic rituals played an increasingly important role in the process of legitimating the socio-political order.

Occasionally, origin myths legitimate positions of status. Apart from their specific content, the presence or absence of such myths is in itself an index of the extent to which the emergence of a particular institution was thought to require explanation or justification or alternatively was regarded as natural.

I will next explore the broader social context, examining in particular the *varṇa* hierarchy (Chapter 7) and the kinship structure and household organization (Chapter 8). As will be evident, the context provided by the development of these institutions influenced, and was in turn influenced by the consolidation of *rājya*.

Data pertaining to the *varṇa* hierarchy are available from all three levels of the tradition. The information relates both to the evolution of the hierarchy as a whole and the changes discernible within it.

[34] The link between the *rājā* and such rituals was particularly close, so much so that Smith (1958: 4) goes to the extent of stating that in the later Vedic situation 'kingship is also a ritual'.

An attempt was made to equate *varṇa* categories with specific distributive networks, typified by ritual exchanges, tribute and trade. It is likely that the ability to divert more or less resources through one or the other channel provides an indication of the relative strength of different *varṇas*. At the same time, efforts to control the distribution of resources created tensions and provided an increasingly complex socio-political backdrop to the emergence of *rājya*.

Related to the above were attempts to define access to positions of status in terms of *varṇa*, the challenges to this, and their resolution. While the *brāhmaṇas* posed a challenge on the basis of sacrality, this was located within the framework of shared political interests. The challenge posed by the *viś* was, in a sense, more fundamental, as it was initially related to an alternative definition of power. However, it was marginalized, both through deliberate efforts and through the growing differentiation within the *viś*.

The processes whereby *varṇa* identities were consolidated or challenged are probably reflected in the relationship between the *brāhmaṇas* and the realm of the sacred. This points to tensions within the *varṇa* framework, which were only partly resolved through attempts to legitimate the order. It is in this context that the envisaged enforcement of at least some *varṇa*-related norms by chiefs or rulers acquires significance.

Finally, I will focus on changes within the kinship structure and household organization. Here there is evidence of a plurality of household forms giving way to what was envisaged as the ideal unit, the *gṛha*, associated with hierarchically ordered kinship ties between husband and wife and father and son. I will argue that this form of household organization permitted the consolidation of both procreative and productive resources. While such a consolidation of power and resources was probably beneficial both from the point of view of the head of the household, the *gṛhapati*, and chiefs or rulers, who could negotiate with him, its maintenance required an elaborate process of socialization, including rites of passage and a range of sacrifices. Besides, attempts to legitimize the new household order resulted in closer ties being forged between the *gṛhapati* on the one hand and the priest and the *rājā* in particular

on the other. The establishment of such bonds was a two-way process, with both participants influencing one another. Thus, I will attempt to arrive at an understanding of the changing content and context of political power and authority, and explore the intermeshing of the two during the area and period under consideration.

Chapter Two

The Significance of Sraiṣṭhya

They, the organs, said to Prajāpati, the father, 'Who, O Lord, is the *śreṣṭha* amongst us?'

Chāndogya Upaniṣad.

I

The period during which the institution of *rājya* developed was characterized by the exploration of a variety of political possibilities. These dealt with questions which were assuming importance, such as over whom or what was power to be exercised? What were the essential attributes of powerful men? What were the roles envisaged for them in society? How were they expected to fulfil such roles? The resolutions envisaged were often varied. Some of these were incorporated within the definition of *rājya* as it evolved, whereas others were marginalized. Amongst the former, the attributes associated with *śraiṣṭhya* were particularly significant.

The term *śreṣṭha* was used in the brahmanical tradition to characterize either a god or a man who occupied the highest or the best position in divine or human society.[1] There is also evidence to suggest that the institution of *śraiṣṭhya* was evolving—this is apparent from the attempts to connect *śraiṣṭhya* with deities such as Indra (e.g. PVB 7.8.2, AB 4.19.3, SB 1.6.3.22)[2] and Prajāpati (e.g.

[1] Definitions of the term include notions of seniority and social status, such as that of a *brāhmaṇa* or king (PSED: s.v.) or those of excellence, primacy and chieftaincy (SED: s.v.).

[2] Other titles used for Indra include *rājā* (e.g. RV 2.14.11, SB 2.6.4.4), *viśpati* (e.g. RV 3.40.3), *svarāj* (RV 3.45.5, SSS 8.17.2), *samrāj* (e.g. RV 4.21.2), *nṛpati* (e.g. RV 4.20.1), *virāj* (e.g. SSS 8.17.2), and *adhipati* (e.g. ApSS 14.3.5). However, neither in the early nor in the later Vedic tradition was Indra the typical divine *rājā*, that position being commonly ascribed to either Varuṇa or

PVB 6.3.9, AB 4.19.3, SB 11.5.4.3), each fairly distinctive,[3] as well as from variations in myths and rituals which legitimized the position of the *śreṣṭha*.

The contrast between Indra and Prajāpati is apparent at a number of levels. While Indra was at the zenith of his importance in the early Vedic tradition, being praised in about 250 hymns in the *Ṛg Veda* (Griswold 1971: 87), Prajāpati was just 'appearing above the horizon' (ibid.: 87). In fact, most of the references to Prajāpati as a distinctive deity occur in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the text, which is commonly regarded as late (Deshmukh 1933: 304, Joshi 1973: 101). Hence, Prajāpati was in all likelihood a non-Vedic deity, and was not Indo-Iranian (Staal 1978: 340). Besides, unlike most deities, his name contained a functional description (ibid.: 341), implying lordship over all beings.

Apart from the possibility of distinct origins, the attributes of Indra and Prajāpati are markedly different, the former being associated with valour, while the latter was considered as responsible for the process of creation and regeneration (Renou 1953: 22). The contrast between the two was expressed rather succinctly in the means of acquiring the status of Viśvakarman (literally all-maker or creator) attributed to them—Indra was thought to have attained the position by killing Vṛtra, while Prajāpati was conceived of as achieving it by creating *prajā* or offspring (AB 4.18.8).

The association of *śraiṣṭhya* with such unique deities opened up a number of often divergent possibilities for those who aspired to a similar position on the human plane. Besides, if Prajāpati and Indra were initially worshipped by distinct groups of people, the suggested identification between the deities through the common attribute of *śraiṣṭhya* would have made possible an amalgamation of such groups and may in fact reflect this process.

Probably related to this was a certain shift in the emphasis on

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Soma. The use of a wide range of titles for a single deity was probably a mechanism for coalescing divergent ideals.

[3] Other deities, less commonly associated with *śraiṣṭhya*, include Agni (e.g. SB 8.3.1.3), conceived of as sharing *śraiṣṭhya* with Indra, and Viṣṇu or Āditya (ibid.: 14.1.1.5).

Indra's characteristic attributes. For instance, the notion of the god as an enemy of the *dāsas* or *dasyus*, common in the early Vedic tradition, is virtually absent in the later Vedic phase. Other attributes, such as his hostility towards Vṛtra, acquire new dimensions, whereas certain features, such as his association with material prosperity, persist. Given Indra's importance in both early Vedic and later Vedic mythology, it is likely that the disjunctures and continuity in Indra's characterization were connected with crucial socio-political issues, and reflect attempts to resolve or contain the tensions inherent in them.

At another level, the rituals associated with the legitimate acquisition of *śraiṣṭhya*, which included the basic *soma* sacrifice and its variants, and the *sautrāmaṇī*, provide a certain perspective on the qualities required of the ideal human *śreṣṭha*. While some of these coincide with the attributes associated with the deities referred to above, there are certain differences as well. Besides, there is evidence which indicates that the very control of the *soma* sacrifice was disputed. This would, once again, suggest a rather fluid situation.

There are incidental references to human *śreṣṭhas* and their characteristic attributes and behaviour, and the goal of *śraiṣṭhya* was recognized as a legitimate one for the *yajamāna* or the male sacrificer. However, references to specific *śreṣṭhas* are virtually absent.[4] Thus, while the importance of *śraiṣṭhya* was not denied within the brahmanical tradition, deliberate attempts were not made to preserve the names of those who occupied such positions,[5] pointing to a certain ambiguity and tension vis-a-vis this institution. The bases of such tensions, which will be explored, provide an understanding of some of the socio-political processes associated with the emergence of *rājya*.

[4] Amongst the few legendary men referred to as a *śreṣṭha* is Śunaḥśepa, who was appointed as a *jyeṣṭha* and *śreṣṭha* by Viśvāmitra (e.g. SSS 15.25.1).

[5] As opposed to this, the brahmanical tradition incorporated stereotyped lists of *rājās*.

II

The notion of the *śreṣṭha* as the best or chief was frequently defined, on both the divine and the human plane, in terms of categories related to or identical with the *śreṣṭha*. For instance, Indra, a *deva* or god, was often regarded as a *śreṣṭha* amongst other *devas* (e.g. SB 1.6.3.22), occasionally striving to attain or assert his position over them (e.g. BSS 18.31). Clearly, the position of the *śreṣṭha*, thus defined, would have been one of first amongst equals, with all the tensions inherent in achieving and maintaining such a position.

Prajāpati's *śraiṣṭhya* was, potentially at least, far more comprehensive. He was identified with the *saṃvatsara* or the year (e.g. PVB 16.4.13, AB 1.1.1., BAU 1.5.14, etc.), which was in turn identified with *sarva* or all (e.g. SB 12.8.2.36)[6] probably owing to the fact that the year was associated with the life cycles of both the plant and animal worlds and hence with the bases of human existence (Gonda 1984: 7–9).[7] Besides:

> Prajāpati is something more, or rather, something less: the name is extended to include the *anirukta*, the symbol of the non-defined, the non-determined . . . He represents all that is undefined, whatever in the divine sphere is left unexpressed by the series of recognized divinities (Renou 1953: 24).

The definition of *śraiṣṭhya* on the human plane was often explicitly equated with that of Indra. For instance the *udbhit*, a variation of the *soma* sacrifice, described as the means whereby Indra acquired *śraiṣṭhya* over the *devas*, was recommended for a man desirous of a similar status amongst his equals (BSS 18.31). More

[6] In the course of the *sautrāmaṇī* (SB 12.8.3.22) Indra was also conceived of as established in totality or *sarva*.

[7] This was based on the homology of the universe conceived from the temporal point of view to the universe as such, the totality of all existence (Gonda 1984: 62). The identification of Prajāpati with the totality of human experience had other implications as well. According to Banerjee (1981: 18): 'He is in fact an attempt to conceive the abstract notion of the first cause of the universe . . . The infinite nature of Prajāpati obtained its final development as the ultimate reality in later philosophy.'

often than not, the *śreṣṭha* was defined in terms of his *samānas* or equals (e.g. PVB 6.3.10, BSS 18.31) and *sva*, literally one's own people (e.g. SB 12.8.2.28, BAU 1.3.18, ASS 10.3.22, SSS 10.16.8).[8]

The definition of *śraiṣṭhya* associated with Indra and commonly adopted on the human plane was thus a fairly limited one, emphasizing the bonds between the *śreṣṭha* and those over whom he asserted control. While this was probably useful in ensuring support, it could, at the same time, be used to challenge the position of the *śreṣṭha*.[9] Moreover, it rendered his position vulnerable in a situation of social differentiation, where the support group of kinsfolk itself was becoming fragmented.[10]

In such a situation, the less tangible definition associated with Prajāpati may have been valuable. While there does not seem to have been any explicit attempt to extend this to the institution on the human plane, it is possible that this element was useful in widening the definition and scope of *śraiṣṭhya*, at least implicitly.[11]

III

The position of the *śreṣṭha*, whether viewed in terms of more or less related people or a vaguely defined totality, was associated with a

[8] Such definitions persist even in the later brahmanical tradition (e.g. SGS 1.19.6). In one instance (SB 1.4.5.5) the *śreṣṭha* was defined as the *śiras* (head) of the *ardha* or community (Eggeling 1963a: 129). Elsewhere (AV 1.9.3) a prayer was offered to ensure *śraiṣṭhya* amongst *sajātas* (literally those sharing a common birth or origin). Occasionally, the scope of *śraiṣṭhya* was widened to include *manusyas* or men in general (SSS 4.5.1). Besides, the possibility of attaining *śraiṣṭhya* over the *janatā*, a term which could both mean a specific community as well as (hu)mankind (SED: s.v.), was discussed (ApSS 5.24.4).

[9] This is a possibility which is discussed in the course of rituals such as the *soma* sacrifice.

[10] While changes in the kinship structure will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8, developments which were most closely connected with the *śreṣṭha* are delineated in Sections VII and VIII below.

[11] This is suggested, for instance, by the analogical discussion (CU 5.1.7) where *prāṇa* or the breath is equated with the *śreṣṭha* as the entire body is affected by its departure, indicating that existence itself depends on the presence of the *śreṣṭha*.

number of distinctive attributes. These included links with the material bases of society. Both the divine and human *śreṣṭhas* were connected with the creation of material resources. In fact, specific links were developed between *śraiṣṭhya* and the processes which were thought to ensure general well-being. These had important socio-economic implications.

Much of the discussion on the basis and means of ensuring prosperity was embedded in cosmogonic speculation. Both the typical divine *śreṣṭhas*, Indra and Prajāpati, were associated with cosmogonies. However, in keeping with their divergent characteristics, Indra's connection with creation myths was closer in the early Vedic tradition, whereas in the later Vedic tradition, Prajāpati emerged as virtually the sole creator god. Moreover, while references to Indra's role as creator are incidental, Prajāpati is associated with a more systematically developed mythology (Keith 1925: 442).

In the early Vedic tradition, Indra was supposed to have established the heaven and earth and the intermediate space (RV 3.30.9) and set the sun on its proper course (ibid.: 3.30.12). Besides, he was conceived of as producing fire (ibid.: 2.12.3), creating the dawn (ibid.: 2.12.7) and releasing the rivers (ibid.: 4.19.5). The means adopted by Indra for attaining these objectives are rarely discussed, although implicitly, some of these acts, such as releasing the rivers, were attributed to his valour. However, these achievements are almost never reiterated in later literature (Rau 1973: 200).

Prajāpati, on the other hand, emerged as a creator god in the latest section of the *Ṛg Veda* (10.121.10), where he was implicitly identified with Hiraṇyagarbha, literally the golden embryo from which creation was thought to commence. In the later Vedic tradition, virtually all aspects of the known world were envisaged as emerging from him. These included the three worlds, the five seasons, the *devas* and *asuras*, the day and night, and the year (SB 11.1.6.22), which, as we have seen, was regarded as synonymous with the totality of human existence.[12] In short, the origin of

[12] Elsewhere (SB 11.5.8.3) the creation of the three Vedas, basic to the ritual, was ascribed to him. In other cases (e.g. SB 6.1.1.8–15), the list of Prajāpati's creations was elaborated to include *brahma*, the waters, Agni, horse, ass, goat, earth, clay, mud, saline soil, sand, gravel, rocks, ore, gold, plants, trees, Vāyu,

virtually every conceivable entity was ascribed to the deity. Thus his association with creation was much more comprehensive than Indra's.

Unlike Indra's case, moreover, the means adopted by Prajāpati for creation were discussed at length. One of the commonest methods associated with the process was *tapas* or austerity, the standard formula being that Prajāpati, being alone, desired to reproduce (e.g. SB 6.1.1.8), and practised austerities to achieve his ends (e.g. AB 2.10.1, SB 11.5.8.1, CU 2.23.3, BSS 14.1., etc.).[13]

Another device frequently associated with Prajāpati's creative activities was sacrifice, often 'perceived' as a result of austerities. In this case, creation was visualized as a process of continuous regeneration, with Prajāpati losing his creative force, which was restored through the performance of specific rituals, ascribed initially to the deity, and later transferred to the human plane, suggesting an equation between the *yajamāna* and Prajāpati.

The association of creation with sacrifice had certain important implications. On the one hand it envisaged a role for human protagonists in creating or restoring the cosmic order. At the same time, the fact that this function was ritualized, suggests that certain specific humans, viz., those who were qualified to perform the sacrifice or get it performed, probably exploited this notion to assert their claims to a unique status.

This possibility is reinforced when one considers specific cosmogonic sacrifices. These include those used to legitimize *śraiṣṭhya* such as the *agniṣṭoma* (PVB 6.1.1), *atirātra* (ibid.: 4.1.4), *dvādaśāha* (AB 4.19.1), and *gārgatrirātra* (PVB 20.16.1), in short, the *soma* sacrifice and its variants.

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the intermediate region, the sun, sky, moon, stars, directions, the eight Vasus, eleven Rudras, twelve Ādityas, the Viśvedevas, and plants and creatures, both mortal and immortal.

[13] The notion of *tapas* as a generative mechanism also occurs in the last *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛg Veda* (10.190.1, 2). Other means of creation associated with Prajāpati include the use of the mystic syllables *bhuh*, *bhuvar* and *svar* (e.g. SB 11.1.6.3), and the *viṣṇukrama* or the three strides of Viṣṇu (ibid.: 6.7.2.12). Occasionally Prajāpati is thought to have taken the form of a horse for this purpose (e.g. PVB 11.3.5).

Certain mythological possibilities were, at the same time, explicitly or implicitly abandoned or modified. These included the possibility of creation starting from a heterosexual pair, implicit in some myths associated with Prajāpati such as that of his incest with his daughter (RV 5.42.13, 1.71.5, 10.61.5–7). The procreative potential of this relationship was not developed in later mythology, although it was recognized as an indirect means of creation, supposedly resulting in the production of *paśu*, animals or cattle (PVB 8.2.10) and *mānuṣa* or men (AB 3.13.9).

Other possibilities which were ignored included analogies with productive processes. Analogies with the activities of craftsmen occasionally provided the underpinnings for mythological speculation in the *Ṛg Veda* (4.56.3, 10.72.2). With the increasing importance of settled agriculture, moreover, the process of growing crops could have enriched such speculation. That such possibilities remained unrealized points to an attempt to deny the importance of physical processes of reproduction and production, while asserting control over their very preconditions or bases by fostering a specific understanding of creation.[14] In effect then, the emphasis on defining sacrifices as creative acts provided the basis for creating distinctions among people, with those who could perform such acts implicitly and occasionally explicitly claiming superiority over those who could not do so. At the same time, efforts were made to convert this superiority into actual control over material resources. Thus, the link envisaged between the divine and human *śreṣṭhas* and the cosmic order, concretized through rituals, was extended to a range of economic and social relationships, and both sharpened and justified growing socio-economic differentiation.

IV

Speculation related to the creation of tangibles and intangibles thus hinged on the establishment of a close identity between Prajāpati and the human *śreṣṭha*, both of whom were associated with the very

[14] It is also likely that the creative activities attributed to Indra were marginalized owing to their association with physical prowess.

conditions of human existence. However, when we turn to the issue of actual control over the resources allegedly created, the situation becomes slightly more complex.

Of the two divine *śreṣṭhas*, Indra was frequently characterized as wealthy (e.g. *vasupati* or lord of wealth, RV 3.30.19). Occasionally, the specific elements of his wealth were enumerated. These included cattle, whence his characterization as *gopati* (e.g. RV 3.30.21), which is one of the most common epithets used for the deity in the *Ṛg Veda* (Dange 1971: 172). Elsewhere (RV 2.21.1) he is described as winning all, wealth, light, fertile land, horses, cattle and waters.

If Indra was characterized as controlling wealth, Prajāpati was, on the other hand, totally identified with items of wealth, including all animals (SB 10.2.1.1), specifically enumerated as man, horse, cow, sheep and goat.

On the human plane, control over material resources was regarded as one of the crucial criteria for acquiring *śraiṣṭhya*, the *śreṣṭha* being defined as he who obtains the most of the earth (SB 11.1.6.23). This was closer to the ideals associated with Indra than to those of Prajāpati.

On the ritual plane, the sacrifices meant to legitimize the acquisition of *śraiṣṭhya* such as the *soma* sacrifice, the *dvādaśāha*, *udbhit* and *sautrāmaṇī* were conceived of as a means of acquiring control over productive resources or produce. These were, more often than not, identified as *paśu*, animals or cattle (BSS 16.4, 18.31), *annādya*, literally the ability to eat (e.g. AB 1.1.5, ApSS 19.4.12) and *prajā* or offspring (ApSS 19.4.12, SSS 8.8.11).

In each of these cases, it was the individual sacrificer who was expected to benefit. The use of the sacrifice for 'acquiring' material benefits has often been viewed as a form of primitive magic to ensure production in situations where control over the environment is limited. It is also likely that those who performed such sacrifices sought, at the same time, to justify their claims to productive resources and produce by suggesting that these were their rewards for the performance of the ritual.

Such assertions were, nonetheless, limited to the acquisition of

animal wealth, food and progeny. References to the major productive resource, land, are conspicuous by their absence. However, attempts were made to widen the scope of the *soma* sacrifice. In one instance (SB 3.9.1.13), Prajāpati was supposed to have appropriated everything by means of an offering to the Viśvedevas. Elsewhere (ibid.: 3.9.1.17) an offering by Prajāpati to the Maruts, explicitly regarded as representatives of the *viś*, is described as a means of acquiring *bhūmān* or plenitude. This probably indicates an attempt to claim all the productive resources available. Ascribing this claim to Prajāpati is explicable in view of his vague, universalistic features. At the same time, his association with the appropriation of wealth is clearly uncharacteristic, contrasting sharply with his usual identification with the totality of human existence.

The invocation of the Maruts and the Viśvedevas, regarded as the counterpart of the *viś* of the deities (PVB 18.1.14, AB 1.2.3) is also significant in this context, implicitly recognizing the control over productive resources exercised by the *viś* which was sought to be appropriated by or for the *śreṣṭha*. The fact that the divine *viś* had to be propitiated with an offering possibly indicates the strength of their human counterparts. Seizing the wealth of the *viś* was clearly not a viable proposition.

There was thus a contrast between the kind of control over resources envisaged for the human *śreṣṭhas* and that associated with Indra and Prajāpati. This dichotomy was probably related to the limits within which men functioned—even those who aspired to be the best or chief could claim only a few resources. At the same time, the broad range of resources associated with the deities suggested the potential which was open to their human counterparts, even if its realization was well-nigh impossible.

Procreation was often recognized as an important aspect of material well-being within the brahmanical tradition. Here again, while both Prajāpati and Indra were associated with obtaining offspring or *prajā*, their links with procreation were fairly distinct. All created beings were regarded, by definition, as Prajāpati's offspring. While there are virtually no references to Indra's progeny in myths, prayers to him were consistently recommended as a means

of obtaining offspring almost throughout the brahmanical tradition (e.g. RV 6.18.6, 10.85.45, PVB 11.6.3–5, BSS 13.2, ApSS 3.15.8, PGS 1.9.5 etc.).

Indra's procreative role was probably linked to his overt masculinity and his characterization as the most masculine of men (*nṛṇām nṛtamaḥ*, RV 6.33.3). It is also likely that the bull-like attributes of Indra (Choudhuri 1981: 4) were linked to notions of virility (Gonda 1965: 77, Dandekar 1951: 43). Indra's very birth was conceived of as unusual (RV 4.18.1–2), as he was thought to emerge on his own initiative, from the side of his mother, symbolic of an assertion of masculine control over the process. This act was explicitly linked to defiance towards and the destruction of his mother.

Given these associations, the invocation of Indra in prayers for progeny meant, in effect, an assertion of the importance of masculinity vis-a-vis female procreative powers. Nevertheless, the importance of the physical process itself was recognized, as control was envisaged in terms of a dominant masculinity rather than as a negation of physicality per se.

Prajāpati's intervention, on the other hand, was conceived in terms of removing procreation from the realm of the physical, as he was thought to have obtained *prajā* by performing sacrifices or through austerities. The association of the reification of the process with a male god meant the complete negation of the role of the female in procreation. This was underscored through prayers or offerings to Prajāpati, which were frequently recommended as a means of acquiring *prajā* (e.g. ASS 10.3.6, SSS 2.10.1, AGS 1.13.7).[15]

On the human plane, rituals legitimizing *śraiṣṭhya* were very often conceived of as a means of acquiring *prajā*. This was especially true of the *soma* sacrifice (e.g. PVB 8.7.8–14, AB 3.13.13, SB 3.8.2.5, ASS 6.12.4, SSS 4.13.1, ApSS 10.4.3), where prayers could occasionally be offered to obtain male offspring in particular (e.g.

[15] Alternatively, rites by means of which Prajāpati was supposed to have obtained *prajā* (SSS 14.60.1, 10.14.8) were recommended for the sacrificer who desired offspring.

AB 3.13.13, SSS 5.9.19, ApSS 12.22.8, LSS 3.3.2). The *dvādaśāha* was viewed as a similar occasion (PVB 11.3.5, AB 4.19.1, SB 4.5.6.4, ASS 10.5.12) as was the *sautrāmaṇī* (SB 12.8.2.6, BSS 17.43).

If the use of the sacrifice to obtain *prajā* rested on an explicit or implicit analogy between Prajāpati and the sacrificer, the specific sacrificial devices employed mimed heterosexual intercourse. At one level, the wives of the *devas* (*devapatnīs*) were invited to the *soma* sacrifice, at which the presence of the sacrificer's wife was also required. These women, divine and human, were thought to ensure procreation by their very presence (PVB 8.7.8–14, AB 3.13.13, SB 3.8.2.5). At another level, heterosexual pairs or *mithunas* were created and employed in the course of the ritual. These could include pairs consisting of inanimate objects, of metres or verses and chants, which were employed in the *soma* sacrifice (AB 1.1.1), *dvādaśāha* (PVB 11.5.16,17, AB 5.24.4), and *sautrāmaṇī* (SB 12.8.2.6). Besides, the sacrificer's wife was utilized in suggestive actions meant to ensure procreation (ApSS 13.15.9, LSS 2.10.16).[16]

The position of the human *śreṣṭha* vis-à-vis *prajā* was thus in many ways distinct from that of both Indra and Prajāpati. Unlike Indra and like Prajāpati, he was *prajākāma* or desirous of offspring. At the same time, he differed from Prajāpati in not being able to claim all *prajā* as his own. Besides, the use of biological symbolism, though ritualized, suggested a recognition of the importance of the physical process, which was very often denied on the mythical plane. However, the very fact that procreation was sought to be ritualized and the context of such ritualization, controlled as it was by the male priests and the *yajamāna*, indicates that an attempt was made to structure the relationship between procreative partners on unequal terms. Clearly, the male was thought to control and benefit from the process, with the female being reduced to an essential instrument. The assertion of control over the process and fruits of procreation was greater than that envisaged for other productive resources. Thus *śraiṣṭhya* rested on the recognition of the claims of

[16] Water was to be poured on her thigh during the *tritīya savana* or the third pressing of *soma*.

individual men to productive resources and produce, typified by *paśu* and *anna*, and on the assertion of control over the procreative powers of women by men.

V

The control which the *śreṣṭha* exercised over productive resources did not imply an ability to dispose off them arbitrarily. The divine *śreṣṭha*, Indra, for instance, was thought to be under an obligation to be generous, typified by the frequent use of the epithet *maghavan* (e.g. RV 6.23.1), indicative of generosity and benevolence (Gonda 1959: 42), for the deity in the *Ṛg Veda* (Griswold 1971: 207, Choudhuri 1981: 4). The term *magha* itself implied connections between the donor and the donee 'obviously expressing the sense of property, wealth, possessions, viewed from the angle of a donor or recipient' (Gonda 1959: 50).

Occasionally, a specific connection was established between the wealth Indra obtained and that which he was expected to distribute. Thus, seers were thought to pray to Indra (RV 3.55.22) as his *sakhās* or friends, hoping to obtain a share of the plants and waters produced for him by the earth.

As suggested by this prayer, an element of conditionality was implicit in Indra's generosity. For instance, those who offered him *soma* could expect to obtain whatever they desired (RV 2.14.8). This notion persists throughout the development of the sacrificial tradition, in the context of the routine rituals such as the annual *sākamedha* (SSS 8.19.5), the fortnightly new and full moon sacrifice (ApSS 3.15.8), and the more complex rituals such as the *gavām ayana* (PVB 4.7.8).

Prajāpati, while not explicitly generous, was conceived of as providing the specific forms of subsistence to the four categories of beings, the *devas*, *pitṛs*, *manuṣyas* and *paśus* (gods, patrilineal ancestors, men and animals respectively, SB 2.4.2.1–5). Unlike Indra, Prajāpati's assistance was not regarded as being conditional on his worship. In a sense, his position was envisaged as one 'above' such connections. Besides, his association with providing sustenance to

diverse categories of beings suggests a much wider role than Indra's limited one vis-à-vis his invokers.

On the human plane, the rituals used for legitimizing *śraiṣṭhya* were often conceived of as a means of promoting general well-being. For instance, different forms of the word Indra could be used on different days of the *dvādaśāha* to ensure that plants ripened during different seasons (PVB 10.8.1). Besides, the basic *soma* sacrifice was conceived of as a means of releasing the fructifying forces of nature (Hubert and Mauss 1964: 92). The association of the *śreṣṭha* with such rituals implied an ability to ensure the prosperity of those who accepted his position.

Such rituals were also occasions on which the *śreṣṭha* was expected to demonstrate his liberality. The *soma* sacrifice incorporated communal feasts using the slaughtered animal and the pressed *soma* (Drury 1981: 36). However, detailed prescriptions pertaining to distribution in this context are generally lacking. This suggests that while customary procedures were probably followed, these were not granted recognition within the brahmanical tradition. There is also some evidence of attempts to restrict participation in such sharing by explicitly defining eligible participants. For instance, part of the oblation offered during the animal sacrifice could be given to the *amātyas*, defined as the *patnī*, *putra* and *bhrātṛ*, that is the wife, son and brother of the sacrificer respectively (ApSS 11.16.13–14).

In contrast to this, the other element of exchange associated with the sacrifice, the *dakṣiṇā*, is discussed in considerable detail. This is not surprising, as the *brāhmaṇas* were the exclusive recipients in this case.[17] While the *soma* sacrifice is described as *śata dakṣiṇā* (with possibly a hundred, cattle as *dakṣiṇā*, e.g. SB 4.3.4.3), the *dakṣiṇā* could occasionally be raised to a thousand (e.g. SB 4.5.1.11).[18] Variations of the *soma* sacrifice such as the *dvādaśāha*

[17] There are some indications that recipients were ideally confined to specific *gotras*. While the Ātreyas were preferred, the Kanakas and Kāśyapas were categorically excluded (ApSS 13.6.12, 13.7.5). This probably reflects an attempt to assert control over the ritual on the part of specific groups of *brāhmaṇas*.

[18] Similar, but not identical variations, are indicated in the Śrauta Sūtras (e.g. BSS 16.9, 25.4, SSS 7.17.18, 13.14.7, ApSS 10.26.1–7). In one instance (ASS 5.3.17) the giving away of the *kanyā* or daughter of the *yajamāna* is recom-

were also commonly associated with gifts of cattle, in this case numbering twelve hundred (e.g. ApSS 21.5.9).

Dakṣiṇā, as is widely recognized, served a range of purposes. It was significant in material terms, implying a transfer of resources from the *yajamāna* to the officiating priests. This is explicitly recognized in the Śrauta Sūtras. For instance, the officiating priests were expected to find out about the *dakṣiṇā* to be offered before undertaking to perform sacrifices (SSS 5.1.10, ApSS 10.1.3), giving the *yajamāna* an incentive by stating that a generous *dakṣiṇā* was a means of converting an ordinary ritual into an auspicious one (ibid.: 10.20.4).

Although the overt and immediate material transaction was one-way, the underlying assumption was that both parties would benefit in the long run. Thus the giving of gold was thought to bring joy to the recipient and longevity to the donor, while a gift of cows was thought to confer joy on the recipient and more cows on the donor (SSS 7.18.1, 2). These notions reflect the underlying assumption that 'the *dakṣiṇā* gift establishes or is expressive of a generative alliance between the giving and receiving parties' (Heesterman 1959: 245). The gift may also have been a means of extending the dominance of the donor over the donee (Gregory 1982: 19, 151), although this is not explicitly acknowledged in the brahmanical tradition.

The exchange of *dakṣiṇā* was, at the same time, a means of distinguishing between the *yajamāna* and the officiating priests, and those excluded from the proceedings. The latter included the rest of the participants present at the sacrifice as well as those who were absent. While participation in such exchanges did not imply a monopoly over the basic productive resources or produce, the ability to convert such resources into social prestige was thus clearly restricted.[19] In other words, the ability to give and receive legitimate-

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mended. Such variations indicate that the sacrifice could have been performed on at least two levels—one relatively simple and the other more complex.

[19] As Gledhill (1988: 15) observes: 'Perhaps, in reality, it is non-subsistence resources which are "basic" from the point of view of understanding increasing political centralization and the opening up of an unbridgeable social gulf between rulers and ruled.'

ly was made explicit, reinforcing related notions of socio-economic status. In this sense *dakṣiṇā* was clearly a gift exchange establishing a relationship between the subjects who participated in the exchange (Gregory 1982: 19), linking those who claimed access to and control over the ritual to those who aspired to participate in the realm of the sacred (Gonda 1965: 209). This connection, moreover, was part of the process of legitimizing the change in the status of the sacrificer.

At another level, *dakṣiṇā* was used to reiterate ritual symbolism. For instance, the *dakṣiṇā* prescribed for the *gārgatrirātra* consisted of a thousand cattle (SSS 16.22.15–18, ApSS 22.15.6), of which the thousandth was considered symbolic of the totality and hence of the regeneration of the cosmos (Heesterman 1959: 247).

Thus, the human *śreṣṭha* evidently utilized some of the resources he acquired to perform sacrifices.[20] These were expected to generate prosperity, being analogous to the rituals performed by or for Prajāpati. At the same time, these were occasions for sharing resources amongst the participants. However, this was characterized by a basic asymmetry. Of the two resources to which the *śreṣṭha* laid claim, *paśu* and *anna*, the former was shared with the priests as *dakṣiṇā*, whereas the latter was probably distributed amongst all the participants in the feasts accompanying the ritual. Thus some participants had access to relatively imperishable and reproducible forms of wealth, whereas the others were granted immediate but transient benefits. In other words, the *śreṣṭha's* generosity, unlike Indra's, was socially differentiated.[21] This must have contributed to the process of socio-economic differentiation and the resultant conflicts and tensions.

[20] There is incidental evidence to suggest that the human *śreṣṭha* may have been associated with the distribution of resources in non-ritual contexts as well. The beneficiaries were, as in the case of Indra, those who were loyal. This is apparent from the statement (SB 10.3.5.9, BAU 1.3.18) that if a man tried to rival (*pratibubhūṣati*) a *śreṣṭha*, he was unable to support his dependents, whereas he was able to do so if he was faithful.

[21] It is this which probably explains the gradual marginalization of the notion of Indra as *maghavan*, reflected, for instance, in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Brockington 1984: 196), where the epithet is rather uncommon.

VI

The links that were emerging or being established between the *śreṣṭha* and what we have identified as constituting the material basis of society thus contained possibilities of conflict centring on the control and distribution of productive and reproductive resources. Some of these were directly related to the process of acquiring *śraiṣṭhya*, whereas in other cases, the *śreṣṭha* was expected to intervene in and resolve tensions and disputes. Such interventions were almost inevitably partisan and were important in ensuring the support of some social categories as opposed to others. Broadly, three major social issues may be identified, connected with defining the *varṇa* hierarchy, the relationship amongst kinsmen and gender stratification respectively. The roles envisaged for the divine and human *śreṣṭha* vis-a-vis these issues and the means adopted to handle them reveal significant variations, suggestive of a changing situation.

As is well known, the only reference to the four *varṇas* in the *Ṛg Veda* occurs in the relatively late Puruṣasūkta (RV 10.90.12). The paucity of references to *varṇa* categories in the text suggests that these had not acquired the social significance which was assigned to them later. In contrast to this, defining the *varṇa* hierarchy emerges as an important problem in the later Vedic tradition. This is evident from speculation regarding its origin, which often justified specific features of the hierarchy, and from attempts to regulate relationships amongst members of various *varṇas*. Both the divine and the human *śreṣṭhas* were associated with these problems, although in different ways.

Of the divine *śreṣṭhas*, Indra was rarely associated with the creation of the *varṇa* hierarchy—one of the few occasions on which he was thought of as endowing each *varṇa* with its characteristic attributes (PVB 13.4.17) results in a rather unique order, with the *rājanya* placed first, followed by the *brāhmaṇa* and *vaiśya*. This is not surprising, given the fact that Indra was often conceived of as the embodiment of *kṣatra* (e.g. RV 6.25.8, SB 2.4.3.6) which refers both to the abstract quality of power and to the second *varṇa* in the conventional hierarchy. Besides, in the ritual context, Indra was associated with the *rājanya* who was required to use verses addressed

to the deity or offer oblations to him in sacrifices such as the *agnyādheya* (SSS 2.3.6) or setting up of the sacrificial fire, and the *soma* sacrifice which formed part of the *rājasūya* (ApSS 18.21.11). At the same time, although Indra's help was invoked in a variety of conflicts in the early Vedic tradition, these were rarely conceived of in *varna* terms.[22]

In the later Vedic tradition, Indra's identity with the *kṣatra* was reiterated in myths. In one instance (BSS 18.35) Agni (representing the first *varṇa*) and Indra were supposed to have prospered jointly, attaining strength and supreme power. However, this prosperity was regarded as the result of Agni's leadership (AB 2.10.5), it being explicitly stated that Indra and Agni do not prosper, whereas Agni and Indra do. Elsewhere (SSS 14.29.1, 2) they were envisaged as engaged in a contest to attain supremacy over the *devas*. The *devas*, alarmed at the possible consequences of this contest, performed a sacrifice[23] which evidently conciliated both deities.

The myths suggest a certain amount of tension in defining the relationship between the *brahma* and the *kṣatra* and point to two possible resolutions—one acknowledging the supremacy of the former and the second emphasizing their unity of interests and mutual support. A third possibility of open conflict resulting in the explicit defeat of one by the other is occasionally explored in the references to Indra's offence of *brahmahatyā* or *bhrūṇahatyā* (the killing of *brāhmaṇa*, e.g. TS 2.5.1, VDS 5.8) for which he was supposedly punished by being deprived of *soma* (AB 7.35.2, SB 12.7.1.10), a way out suggested being the transferring of the guilt incurred. In other words, an attempt was made by the *brāhmaṇas* to convert a physical defeat into a moral victory and maintain an uneasy balance.

Indra symbolized *kṣatra* in myths and rituals exploring the *kṣatra-viś* relationship as well. Thus, an offering to Indra and the

[22] Even when *varṇa* categories were used, the context was a two-fold rather than a four-fold one. For instance, Indra was invoked to protect the *ārya varṇa* against the *dasyus* (RV 3.34.9).

[23] This was recommended for the *brāhmaṇa* and the *kṣatriya* on the occasion when the latter appointed the former as a *purohita*, a situation in which the relative status of the appointer and the appointee would have been ambiguous.

> Maruts was recommended (BSS 13.19) to ensure that the *kṣatra* and *viś* were in accord with one another. In another instance (PVB 6.10.10–11) the joint invocation of Indra and the Maruts was regarded as a means of ensuring that the *viś* did not desert the *rājanya*.[24]

However, the connection between the *kṣatra* or *rājanya* and the *viś* was not always regarded as desirable. For instance, the offering of *soma* to Indra along with the Maruts (SB 4.3.3.15–16) was compared to a man desirous of victory eating food from the same vessel as the *viś* as a means of winning their support; the practice was dismissed as evil and a separate cup for Mahendra (literally the great Indra) was recommended instead. This was probably an assertion of the relative importance of the leader and the led in ensuring success in military ventures. The emphasis on the role of the former would point to the growing socio-political differentiation between the two. This would also explain the possibility of discord between the *kṣatra* and the *viś* which was sought to be resolved through myths and rituals.

Prajāpati, unlike Indra, was frequently associated with the creation of the *varṇa* hierarchy amongst other things (e.g. AB 7.34.1, SB 2.1.4.12). However, he was usually not assigned a position within the hierarchy, being placed, in a sense, above it.[25]

The creation of the *varṇa* hierarchy ascribed to Prajāpati very often involved variations of the Puruṣasūkta (e.g. PVB 6.1.6–11).[26] However, unlike the *puruṣa* or the primeval being who was not envisaged as controlling the process, Prajāpati was assigned a determinant role, and the very process of creation was used to justify the hierarchical relationship amongst the *varṇas*. Thus the 'eating' of the *vaiśya* by the *brāhmaṇa* and the *rājanya* was justified on the

[24] The *viś* was made *anapakrāmukā* in this context.

[25] This aloofness resembles that discernible in his links with economic resources, and contrasts with the position of other deities such as Indra and the Maruts.

[26] In this case, Agni, the *brāhmaṇa*, spring, the *trivṛt stoma* and *gāyatrī* metre were thought to be produced from his mouth; Indra, the *rājanya*, summer, the *pañcadaśa stoma* and the *triṣṭubh* metre from his breast; the *vaiśya*, *saptadaśa stoma*, *jagatī* metre and the Viśvedevas from his middle and reproductive organ, and the *śūdra*, *ekaviṃśa stoma* and *anuṣṭubh* metre from his feet.

ground that the former was created from the lower organs (including the generative ones) of Prajāpati (PVB 6.1.10), while the *śūdra* was denied access to rituals as he had been created without a deity (ibid.: 6.1.11), the entire hierarchy being viewed as a means of distinguishing between good and evil (ibid.: 6.1.12). In another instance (AB 7.34.1), Prajāpati was associated with the creation of the *yajña* or sacrifice, *brahma* and *kṣatra*, and two types of *prajā*—*hutāda* (oblation-eaters) and *ahutāda* (those debarred from eating oblations)—with the *brāhmaṇas* in the first category and the *rājanya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra* in the second. Such myths evidently sought to justify the exploitation of one *varṇa* by another and to define access to the realm of the sacred.

Nevertheless, not all creation myths reflected the hierarchical pattern so explicitly. In one instance (SB 2.1.4.11–12) Prajāpati was conceived of as using the three syllables *bhuh*, *bhuvar* and *svar* to create the earth, intermediate space and heaven, the *brahma*, *kṣatra*, and *viś*, and the *ātman*, *prajā* and *paśu*. Here the lowest *varṇa* was equated with the highest spatial category. The existence of such variations would point to the relatively fluid nature of the hierarchy which permitted a range of speculations.

The possibility of such alternatives is reflected in the role assigned to the Maruts, the divine *viś* in myths. The Indra-Maruts relationship was suggestive of strains and tensions within the *kṣatra-viś* relationship. The Prajāpati-Maruts connection points to opposition to the entire order whose creation was ascribed to Prajāpati. In one instance (SB 2.5.1.12, 13) the Maruts were conceived of as threatening to destroy the *prajā* created by Prajāpati and were ultimately placated with a share of the *soma* sacrifice. That the resolution envisaged was in terms of conciliation rather than destruction or suppression would indicate the relative strength of the *viś* vis-à-vis the other categories of the emerging hierarchy, a suggestion which is borne out by the rituals associated with the acquisition of *śraiṣṭhya*.

The *soma* sacrifice provided an occasion for communicating statements regarding the attributes of the *varṇas* and their mutual relationships. While prayers were offered for the protection of the *brahma*, *kṣatra*, and *viś* in this context (BSS 7.7), the goals envisaged

varied according to the *varṇa* of the *yajamāna*, including *brahma-varcas* or priestly lustre for the *brāhmaṇa*, *indriya* or prowess for the *rājanya* and *paśu* and *annādya* for the *vaiśya* (AB 1.1.5).[27] Attempts were made to ensure these varied goals by invoking specific deities, Bṛhaspati, Indra and the Viśvedevas, for the *brāhmaṇa*, *rājanya* and *vaiśya* respectively (ApSS 18.21.11), and through the use of distinct metres for the chants employed in the ritual (BSS 10.17).[28] The use of such variations meant that while the sacrifice was open to men of the first three *varṇas*, its very performance would have led to differentiation amongst them by focusing on the distinct attributes associated with the *yajamānas* belonging to different categories.

Relations with the fourth *varṇa* were also regulated through the ritual, as the man initiated for the *soma* sacrifice could not talk directly to a *śūdra* (SB 3.1.1.10); he could do so indirectly only if absolutely necessary. This would have conveyed the notion of the *śūdra* as potentially polluting in the ritual context. Besides, in ritual actions such as washing the seat on which the sacrificial *soma* was placed, the *brāhmaṇa* was expected to pour water while the *śūdra* washed the seat (BSS 6.17). Such regulated communication and gestures conveyed important messages concerning relative status to all those who participated in or witnessed the ceremony.

The *soma* sacrifice was also a means of distinguishing amongst *brāhmaṇas*, as the officiating priests had to be those whose claims to *ārṣeya* origins or descent from Vedic seers were accepted (SSS 5.1.1, ApSS 10.1.1) and who were physically unblemished, young and learned (SSS 5.1.1).[29] Clearly, the very ability to perform such

[27] Similar variations are suggested in the ApSS (4.6.2) and in the context of the *sautrāmaṇī* (LSS 5.4.19).

[28] In this case the *gāyatrī* metre was prescribed for the *brāhmaṇa* and the *triṣṭubh* for the *rājanya*. Very often, the formulae varied according to the *varṇa* of the *yajamāna* (ApSS 10.12.8). Visible symbols such as the colour of the cow used for the exchange of *soma* could also vary according to *varṇa* (ibid.: 10.22.5).

[29] The *gotra* and *pravara*, which traced descent from recognized seers, and the immediate patrilineal ancestry of the priest were referred to in the course of the sacrifice (BSS 6.5).

a ritual would have contributed to the prestige and renown of the priests.[30]

Nevertheless, not all *varṇa* related statements were unambiguous. For instance, the *yajamāna* who was initiated for the sacrifice was regarded as a *brāhmaṇa* even though he may have been a *rājanya* or a *vaiśya* (ApSS 10.11.6). While this could mean an assertion of the exclusive right of *brāhmaṇas* to participate in the sacrifice, it also provided for the temporary brahmanization of the *yajamāna*, rendering the position of the *brāhmaṇa* more accessible and challenging the claims of the *brāhmaṇas* to a unique status.

More important is the evidence of conflicting goals of the sacrifice vis-a-vis the *varṇa* hierarchy. While the sacrifice was occasionally viewed as a means of ensuring the well-being of the undifferentiated *viś* (e.g. SB 4.2.4.23), it also provided an occasion for exploring alternative forms of the *kṣatra-viś* relationship. On the one hand the ritual was used to ensure that the *viś* was submissive (*apratyudyāminī*, literally not refractory, AB 6.29.5), while on the other hand, the alternative was also known, being explicitly forbidden in some cases (ibid.).[31]

If the *soma* sacrifice could be used to render the *kṣatra* more powerful than the *viś* and vice versa (ApSS 14.6.8, 9), other sacrifices legitimizing *śraiṣṭhya* contained categorical statements favouring what emerged as the 'proper' order and relationship. The *dvādaśāha*, for instance, was used to ensure that the *kṣatra* and *viś* followed the *brāhmaṇa* (PVB 11.11.8, 15.6.3), whereas in the *sautrāmaṇī* (SB 12.7.3.15), the cups of liquor (*surā*) representing the *viś* and those of milk symbolic of the *kṣatra*, were drawn so as to ensure that the *kṣatra* and the *viś* remained connected with one another.

The rituals associated with *śraiṣṭhya* point to the importance of defining the *kṣatra-viś* relationship. At the same time, they point to the difficulties in ensuring the support and subordination of the *viś*. While such problems could be resolved on the mythical plane

[30] As opposed to this *brāhmaṇas* who did not perform the *soma* sacrifice were condemned (ADS 2.6.11.35).

[31] Similarly, the *viś* could be used to destroy the *rāṣṭra* through variations in the placement of the pot containing *soma* and the pressing stones (LSS 1.10.13).

by envisaging the creation of social categories in terms of a well-ordered, inviolable, 'natural' hierarchy, the evidence of a range of speculation suggests that enforcing a uniform ideal or norm was not possible. In this context, it is not surprising that although there are occasional references to suggest that the *śreṣṭha* should be a *rājanya* (AB 1.5.2), the *śreṣṭha* was not expected to uphold the *varṇa* hierarchy. Clearly, the position of the human *śreṣṭha* was closer to that of Indra, caught between a *viś* which could and probably did exercise the option of moving out of his sphere of control, thus weakening his claims to power, and the *brāhmaṇas* who attempted to assert a monopoly over the rituals which legitimized his position, and offered support, but at a price. Situated thus, the *śreṣṭha* was not in a position to establish or maintain the norms governing inter-*varṇa* relationships, which were acquiring increasing importance.

VII

The relationship amongst kinsmen was in a sense more central to the definition and acquisition of *śraiṣṭhya*. This is not surprising, given the fact that the position of the *śreṣṭha* was defined in terms of *svas* or *samānas*. While the first term suggests being related (literally one's own), the second stressed equality such as would have existed amongst kinsmen of the same generation. The very assertion of *śraiṣṭhya* in such a situation was potentially a tension-ridden process, requiring as it did the support of kinsfolk, from whom the *śreṣṭha* at the same time sought to distinguish himself. The emergence of *śraiṣṭhya* was accompanied by the transformation of relationships amongst kinsmen—involving, on the one hand, growing hostility amongst kinsmen of the same generation, and on the other, a strengthening of ties linking kinsmen of different generations.

The Indra-Vṛtra struggle evidently provided one of the most powerful analogies for conflicts amongst kinsmen. This was one sphere where an early mythical tradition was substantially modified to reflect new concerns. Victory over Vṛtra (e.g. RV 2.11.18, AV 6.98.3, PVB 8.5.2, SB 4.3.3.5) was basic to Indra's characterization

in the early Vedic tradition, as is evident from the fact that Vṛtrahan or Vṛtra-killer is his most common epithet (Griswold 1971: 207), being used over a hundred times in the *Ṛg Veda* (Choudhuri 1981: 4).[32]

In the early Vedic context, the Indra-Vṛtra conflict has been interpreted at a number of levels (Varenne 1978: 379–382, Lahiri 1982: 1)—as a struggle between the forces of nature, specifically of rain and drought, or light and darkness, as a social conflict between Aryans and non-Aryans, and as a cosmogonic myth. What is perhaps more significant for the present discussion is that certain new elements were introduced into the conflict in the later Vedic tradition. These include the identification of Vṛtra with Soma (e.g. SB 3.4.3.13) which, as Lahiri (1982: 173) points out, 'is not hinted at in the *Ṛg Veda*'. This was significant because Soma was important both as a deity and as a typical divine *rājā*. Related to this was an element of ambiguity vis-a-vis the outcome of the conflict—Indra's victory was no longer regarded as an unalloyed triumph. Although he was conceived of as becoming *mahat* or great through this act (e.g. SB 1.6.4.21, AA 1.1.1.2), he was thought to be unsure of himself and took refuge in a cow (PVB 12.5.21) and the *anuṣṭubh* metre (AB 3.12.4). Further, he was regarded as being devoid of strength after the struggle, and had to be restored through rituals (PVB 18.5.2). Not only was he weakened, he was viewed as impure, and the sin of *vṛtrahatyā* or the killing of Vṛtra had to be expiated by performing a *paurṇamāsa iṣṭi* (full moon sacrifice, SB 6.2.2.19).[33]

[32] The importance of this conflict is also reflected in attempts to extend the use of the epithet to other deities such as Agni (RV 1.74.3), Soma (ibid.: 1.91.5) and Sarasvatī (Vṛtraghnī, ibid.: 6.61.7). Indra's victory over Vṛtra and his role as the leader of the *devas* against the *asuras* are frequently alluded to in what Brockington (1984: 195) identifies as the first stage of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

[33] The notion of Indra's impurity is reiterated in other situations as well. This was used to justify denying a share in the *soma* sacrifice to Indra, and, by extension, to the *kṣatra* (AB 7.35.2). Elsewhere (TS 2.5.1, VDS 5.8), the notion of menstruation as impure was justified on the grounds that it was the result of the guilt of *brahmahatyā*, the killing of *brāhmaṇas*, transferred to women by Indra.

This notion of an ambiguous contest is reiterated on the ritual plane as well, where a part of the *dakṣiṇā* given for the *jyotiṣṭoma*, a variation of the *soma* sacrifice, was regarded as a *vaira* (PVB 16.1.12) or wergeld, meant to propitiate the *devas* who were thought to be hostile after the killing of Soma, which was equated with the slaying of a brave man, *vīraha* (BSS 25.4).

Another simultaneous development was related to the characterization of the *asuras*. In the early Vedic tradition, virtually all the major *devas* were regarded as *asuras* in a positive sense. These included Varuṇa (RV 1.24.14), Savitṛ (ibid.: 4.53.1), Indra (ibid.: 3.38.4), Agni (ibid.: 3.3.4), Soma and Rudra (ibid.: 6.74.1), and Dyaus (ibid.: 1.131.1). Besides, *asuratva* was regarded as a basic attribute of the *devas* (ibid.: 3.55.1).[34] Even in the later Vedic tradition, where the term *asuras* acquired negative connotations and the *devas* and *asuras* were conceptualized as irreconcilable enemies, their common origin as sons of Prajāpati is frequently reiterated (BAU 1.3.1, SSS 10.14.8).[35]

As in the struggle against Vṛtra, Indra was conceived of as playing an active role in the *deva-asura* conflict (e.g. SB 9.2.3.3)[36] and once again, his participation in this was occasionally viewed as an ambiguous, or even evil act (*akārya*, literally that which should not be done, PVB 22.14.2), which had to be expiated by the performance of a sacrifice. At the same time, many of the achievements ascribed to Indra in the early Vedic tradition, such as the destruction

[34] According to Rajwade (1919: 18), of a total of 105 occurrences of the term *asura* in the *Ṛg Veda*, only 15 are negative, while Chattopadhyaya (1935: 34) states that 14 of the 108 occurrences are negative. Most of the negative references occur in the tenth *maṇḍala* (Paranjpe 1975: 195). Hale (1986: 181) argues that the conceptualization of the *asuras* in the later Vedic tradition reflects a tendency to mythologize human enemies into enemies of the gods.

[35] In the former case the *asuras* are described as the elder brothers of the *devas*. The hostility and virtual equality of the *devas* and the *asuras* is reiterated in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Brockington 1984: 203). In view of such connections, attempts to identify the *asuras* with the Assyrians (Bhandarkar 1933: 97), that is with a completely alien group, do not seem to be justified.

[36] While Prajāpati was not envisaged as having a role in the Indra-Vṛtra conflict, he was occasionally conceived of as tilting the scales in favour of the *devas* in the *deva-asura* conflict (e.g. PVB 12.13.27).

of *puras* (e.g. RV 1.63.2), of the *dasyus* (ibid.: 2.11.18), *dāsas* (ibid.: 3.12.6), the serpent Ahi (ibid.: 2.11.2) and of the Paṇis (ibid.: 6.20.4), are rarely referred to in the later Vedic tradition.[37] Such transformations in mythology were, moreover, related to the ritual plane, where the *deva-asura* and/or the Indra-Vṛtra conflict was frequently equated with that between the *yajamāna* and his *bhrātṛvya* or *sapatna* (e.g. PVB 12.3.14).

Both the terms *bhrātṛvya* and *sapatna* have aroused a considerable amount of speculation. The former literally meant a brother-like man[38] and may have meant the father's brother's son, although the term became virtually synonymous with enmity (VI: s.v.). The process whereby a kinship term acquired negative connotations has been variously explained in terms of the fights between brothers and cousins for property (Apte 1954: 47) which assumed importance with the beginnings of settled life (Rai 1974: 28, Vaidya 1928: 290), and in terms of the possible conflicts amongst brothers-in-law in an exogamous system (Banerjea 1963: 60).[39]

The term *sapatna* 'is a curious masculine formed by analogy from *sapatnī*, co-wife and so female rival' (VI: s.v.). However, the term *sapatnī*, from which *sapatna* is allegedly derived, often had a positive connotation in the early Vedic tradition. For instance, the term occasionally refers to a harmonious feminine duality, probably the Heaven and Earth, or Night and Day (RV 3.1.10), and to the wives of Agni (ibid.: 3.6.4)[40] while in the later Vedic tradition the

[37] In the post-Vedic context, although the epithet *purandara* is used for Indra in the early sections of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is rather rare (Brockington 1984: 196).

[38] Its construction may have been similar to *pitṛvya* (father's brother, i.e. a father-like man, Banerjea 1963: 56).

[39] Other possibilities suggested include a quarrel between Iranians and Aryans (Vaidya 1926: 290, Apte 1954: 47). It should be noted that hostility per se is by no means unknown in the *Ṛg Veda* where a range of terms was used to denote enemies, including *amitra* (literally not-friend, RV 3.18.2), *abhimāti* (ibid.: 3.24.1), *arāti* (ibid.) and *śatru* (ibid.: 3.54.22). Besides, prayers were offered to ensure success against the *dāsas* and *dasyus* (e.g. ibid.: 6.25.2). However, unlike the terms *bhrātṛvya* and *sapatna*, none of these had kinship connotations. In other words, the enemy was earlier conceived of as existing without rather than within the kin group.

[40] Examples of the negative usage of the term are confined to the relatively

masculine form of the word is much more common than the feminine form.

Alternatively, the term may be interpreted as men sharing a common wife.[41] Given the fact that actual examples of polyandry are rather rare, it is possible that what is meant by the term is rivalry between men related through a woman who may have been the wife of one of them. In any case the *sapatna*, like the *bhrātṛvya*, belonged to the same generation as the *yajamāna*.

Both the mythological and the human conflicts were conceived of as centring around the control of material resources. These consisted of *paśu* (PVB 8.4.6–7), including, occasionally, the mythical *kāmadhuk* or wish-fulfilling cow (ibid.: 11.5.9), and *anna*.[42] As noted earlier, these were the very resources which were regarded as essential for the acquisition of *śraiṣṭhya*. What is also significant is that both the *yajamāna* and the *bhrātṛvya* were conceived of as possessing identical resources and efforts were made by one to assert complete control over such resources to the total exclusion of the other.[43]

A second area of conflict pertained to attitudes towards and access to or control over the sacrificial cult. Here, there is some divergence between the *deva-asura* conflict and that between the *yajamāna* and his *bhrātṛvya*. In the later Vedic tradition, the attitude of the *devas* and *asuras* vis-à-vis rituals is often conceived of in terms

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late tenth *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛg Veda*. Two *sūktas*, meant to ensure the destruction of the *sapatnī* and the *sapatna* respectively (RV 10.145, 166), deal with such rivalry. In the former, Indrāṇī claims to drive away her *sapatnīs* and have her husband solely to herself. However, in the later Vedic tradition, men rather than women prayed to destroy their rivals.

[41] *samāna patnī vartate yasya saḥ sapatnaḥ*.

[42] Special sacrifices to deprive the *bhrātṛvya* of his *annādya* and to destroy his *goṣṭha* or cow pen were prescribed (BSS 3.21). Attempts were also made to deprive the *sapatnas* of *oṣadhis* or plants through the ritual (SB 3.6.1.9, 10).

[43] The conflict inherent in this is reflected in the characterization of the *asuras*. On the one hand they were regarded as barren soil (SB 9.5.1.7), while on the other hand they were thought to be familiar with all major agricultural operations, and could even obtain crops without ploughing (ibid.: 1.6.1.2–4). This would suggest that their prosperity, like that of the *bhrātṛvya*, was worthless to the sacrificer unless and until it could be totally appropriated.

of outright opposition. In one instance (SB 5.1.1.1), the *asuras* are said to have put offerings into their own mouths out of excessive pride (*atimāna*) which led to their decline. The *devas*, by contrast, were conceived of as making offerings to one another, consequently prospering and attaining Prajāpati or the *yajña* (ibid.: 5.1.1.2). More generally, the *asuras* were conceived of as being hostile to all sacred activities (CU 8.8.5). Thus, they did not offer gifts or perform sacrifices and lacked faith.[44]

Elsewhere, the *deva-asura* conflict is envisaged within the ritual framework, where both attempt to establish control over the cult. It is this aspect which is reiterated in the course of the *yajamāna-bhrātṛvya* struggle.[45] Thus, knowledge of how the *devas* succeeded in wresting control of the cult from the *asuras* was thought to enable the sacrificer to take away the *yajña* from his *bhrātṛvya* (PVB 8.3.4), the sacrifices appropriated in this context being identified as the daily *agnihotra*, the fortnightly *darśapūrṇamāsa*, the *cāturmāsyas* associated with the agrarian cycle and the *soma* sacrifice (ibid.: 8.6.5–7).[46]

Despite such attempts to assert unilateral control over the cult, there is evidence to suggest that rivals very often sought to outdo one another in the performance of rituals. This is indicated by the provision for alternative sacrifices—if the *bhrātṛvya* performed the *anukriyā*, the *yajamāna* could outsmart him by performing the

[44] Occasionally (SB 9.5.1.12–17) the struggle between the *devas* and *asuras* is formulated in ethical terms. Initially both spoke both truth and falsehood. Then the *devas* took to speaking only the truth, as a result of which they became weak and poor, but prospered ultimately, whereas the *asuras* prospered initially but came to naught with the passage of time.

[45] The first aspect of outright hostility towards the cult is characteristic of enemies in the early Vedic tradition. For instance, opponents such as the *dāsas* or *dasyus* are described as *anyavrata* (RV 10.22.8), that is, those following different practices, *ayajvan* (ibid.: 8.70.11) or devoid of sacrifices and *adeva* (ibid.: 9.105.6), literally without gods. As opposed to this, the *devas* were associated with spreading the *āryavrata* (ibid.: 10.65.11).

[46] Elsewhere (SB 11.5.9.4, 5), there is a more general reference to the sacrificer acquiring all sacrifices (*sarva yajña*) from his *bhrātṛvya*. On the mythical plane, Indra was likewise thought to acquire the *ṛc*. *yajus*, and *sāman* formulae, basic to the ritual, from Vṛtra (ibid.: 5.5.5.3–5).

parikriyā, and if the *bhrātṛvya* performed the latter sacrifice, the *yajamāna* could outdo him by performing the *atikriyā* (SSS 14.42.6).

In other instances, attempts were made to ensure the subordination of the *bhrātṛvya* to the *yajamāna* by symbolically depriving him of his power of speech (PVB 9.1.13) and rendering him powerless to retort (*aprativādin*, ibid.: 10.7.3). Attempts were also made to deprive the *sapatna* of their faculty of speech (SB 3.2.1.24) and strength (ibid.: 4.5.3.4).

Occasionally, the struggle was conceived of as a cosmic one on both the mythical and the ritual plane. Thus, the *devas* and the *asuras* were envisaged as struggling for the *saṃvatsara* or Prajāpati (e.g. SB 1.5.3.2) or for the spatial directions (ibid.: 13.8.1.5). On the human plane, the basic units of time, day and night, could be obtained by the sacrificer who performed the *dvādaśāha* correctly, these being lost to his *bhrātṛvya* in case of mistakes (AB 5.24.5). Elsewhere (PVB 5.5.15) the conflict was viewed as one for the control of the sun, or for that of the three worlds (SSS 4.12.10).[47]

The sacrifices which legitimized the position of the *śreṣṭha* were frequently regarded as a means of destroying the *bhrātṛvya* and his powers as well. The use of verses referring to the slaying of Vṛtra by Indra was recommended in the context of the *soma* sacrifice (AB 1.1.4) as a means of equating the *yajamāna* with Indra. Besides, prayers were offered to ensure the destruction of both *sapatnas* and *bhrātṛvyas* (AB 1.4.7, SB 3.5.1.33, BSS 6.28). Destruction of such rivals also figured amongst the goals of the *dvādaśāha* (AB 5.24.5).[48]

[47] Similarly, victory over the *sapatnas* was envisaged in terms of excluding them from the three worlds (e.g. SB 1.9.3.11) and from the *saṃvatsara* (ibid.: 4.2.4.12).

[48] Indra's role in destroying Vṛtra and hence the *bhrātṛvya* or *sapatna* was frequently referred to in such rituals. For instance, in the context of the *soma* sacrifice, he was described as one who troubles the *bhrātṛvya* (BSS 7.12), a specific offering to Indra Vṛtratu (the destroyer of Vṛtra) being recommended for the *bhrātṛvyavat* (ApSS 3.16.3). Besides, Indra was invoked to destroy the *sapatnas* of the sacrificer in the context of the new and full moon sacrifice (BSS 1.19), special *iṣṭis* to him being recommended for the *bhrātṛvyavat* (ibid.: 17.47), whose enemies were symbolically destroyed with the help of Indra's *vajra* or thunderbolt (ibid.: 3.27).

The Indra-Vṛtra or *deva-asura*/*yajamāna-bhrātṛvya*/*sapatna* struggle was thus part of the process of acquiring *śraiṣṭhya*. The conflict, moreover, 'centres on the relative legitimacy of similar claims, not the relative merits of substantially different programmes' (Brumfiel 1989: 127), features characteristic of a factional struggle for power or prestige between more or less similarly endowed groups. Unlike conflicts between *varṇa* categories, moreover, this was a situation in which co-existence was not considered possible.

And yet, the destruction of kinsmen or the bonds which linked them presented problems. These were in part moral or ethical, evident in the ambiguous attitude towards the victors in the conflict. Incidental references indicate that the acquisition or attainment of *śraiṣṭhya* was regarded as evil, reflected in the notion that he who attains *śraiṣṭhya* becomes sinful (AB 1.3.2), [49] or even pock marked (ApSS 5.24.4).

A development which ran parallel to the hostility towards the *bhrātṛvya* and the *sapatna* was the link, often bordering on identity, envisaged between the *jyeṣṭha*, literally the eldest and the *śreṣṭha*.[50] This was established, at one level by equating/associating the former with Indra (e.g. RV 2.16.1, SB 8.7.1.6, BSS 10.56) and Prajāpati (e.g. AB4.19.3).[51] A somewhat similar identification was envisaged in the legend of Śunaḥśepa who was appointed as a *jyeṣṭha* and *śreṣṭha* by Viśvāmitra (e.g. AB 7.33.5, SSS 15.25.1).

The emphasis on *jyaiṣṭhya* implied a differentiation amongst brothers in particular and kinsfolk in general, asserting the distinct status of a single man as opposed to the rest. The possibility of the *jyeṣṭha* possessing or being endowed with prosperity was evidently recognized as valid and justified. Variations in the *soma* sacrifice were prescribed for the *jaiṣṭhineya* (the eldest son of the eldest wife)

[49] *Yaḥ śreṣṭhatām aśnute saḥ kilbiṣam bhavati.*

[50] The former term meant most excellent, pre-eminent, first, chief, best, greatest (SED: s.v.), connotations virtually identical with those associated with the *śreṣṭha*. '*Jyeṣṭha*, ordinarily meaning "greatest", has the further specific sense of "eldest brother" in the Ṛg Veda. It also meant the eldest amongst sons, which is another side of the same sense' (VI: s.v.).

[51] Other deities occasionally associated with *jyaiṣṭhya* include Mitra and Varuṇa (RV 6.67.1, 4.1.2).

who was *gataśrī*, that is who had attained prosperity (ApSS 2.19.3). While the nature of the resources controlled by the *jyeṣṭha* are not specified, it is clear that, as opposed to the *bhrāṭṛvya*'s or the *sapatna's* claims, those of the *jyeṣṭha* were accorded legitimacy.

The very position of the *jyeṣṭha* was, moreover, legitimized through the use of the *anuṣṭubh* metre during the *soma* sacrifice (PVB 8.7.3) as well as through variations on the ritual (e.g. AB 4.19.3). In many cases, an explicit parallel was drawn between Indra's assertion of *jyaiṣṭhya* over the *devas* and that of the *yajamāna* over his kinsfolk.[52]

Implicit in the use of such mechanisms was an understanding that *jyaiṣṭhya* was not naturally accorded to the first-born son. On the divine plane, while Prajāpati in his capacity as creator could logically be conceived of as the first-born, Indra's association with the position was regarded as something which had to be achieved. In Śunaḥśepa's case, likewise, the position was evidently conferred (AB 7.33.5, SSS 15.25) in a sacrificial context. Śunaḥśepa's story also points to resistance to the imposition of a *jyeṣṭha*, which Viśvāmitra countered by banishing his recalcitrant sons. The prescription of a ritual known as the *jyaiṣṭhastoma* (SSS 14.31.1) for a man who belonged to a *kaniṣṭha kula* (literally a young, small or subordinate family) but aspired to *jyaiṣṭhya*, also points to a relatively fluid position. In such a situation, what was emphasized was not so much primogeniture, but a claim to superior status on the part of any one son or kinsman to the exclusion of others. Assertions of such claims, as well as the destruction or distortion of earlier or existing networks of support necessitated a search for alternatives. Hence, attempts were made to strengthen the bonds between the *śreṣṭha* or *jyeṣṭha* and other kinsmen, especially through rituals.

Amongst the ties which were thus focused on, those with the male patrilineal ancestors, the *pitṛs*, were evidently the most significant, offerings to them being prescribed as part of the *soma* sacrifice (e.g. BSS 8.17, SSS 8.2.13, LSS 2.10.4).[53] This was clearly

[52] For instance, the *dvādaśāha*, allegedly used by Indra for this purpose, was recommended for the man who aspired to *jyaiṣṭhya* (AB 4.19.3).

[53] Offerings to the *pitṛs* were also recommended as a part of the *sautrāmaṇī* (BSS 17.37).

a new development, unparalled in myths. Of the divine *śreṣṭhas*, Indra's relations with his parents was thought to be tension-ridden (e.g. RV 4.17.12) and while efforts were made to link him to Prajāpati in the later Vedic tradition (discussed below), he was devoid of an elaborate patrilineage. Prajāpati, likewise, lacked ancestors, which was logically inevitable, given his conceptualization as creator.[54] Nevertheless, for the human *śreṣṭha*, the reiteration of his patrilineal connections was considered important enough to be incorporated within the ritual.

The emphasis on patrilineal ties to the exclusion of other kinship connections invested the former with an element of sanctity. Besides, it pointed to the importance of 'proper' patrilineal connections for the man who aspired to *śraiṣṭhya*. This implied an exclusion of those who did not have access to such bonds or who may have followed alternative patterns of identification. Further, although we do not have any specific references to *śreṣṭhas* inheriting their father's position on the human plane, [55] such possibilities would have been opened up by the recommended recollection of patrilineal ancestors.

Occasionally, the use of ritualistic genealogies was also recommended in the same context. These included the *ārṣeya* (SSS 5.16.5,

[54] Prajāpati did, however, have a number of sons, including Agni, Indra, Soma and Pārameṣṭhin Prājāpatya (SB 11.1.6.14), and as mentioned earlier, the *asuras*. Apart from this, virtually all created beings were regarded as his descendants. It is probably this which justified the use of his name for sacrificers whose *ārṣeya* was unknown (ASS 3.2.8) as well as the offering to him to ensure proper ties between father and son in the course of the *rājasūya* (SB 5.4.2.9). Indra was occasionally invoked as the most fatherly of fathers (*pitā pitṛtamaḥ*, RV 4.17.17), although he has also occasionally been conceived of as a *sajāta* (ibid.: 8.83.7) and *āpi* (ibid.: 4.17.17) of the sacrificer. Such terms were suggestive of kinship in general and did not imply a stratification in terms of generations.

[55] For explorations of this possibility in myths, see below. Although patriliny was emphasized, primogeniture was less important. Moreover, the father-son relationship was probably not very sharply structured in terms of power and authority. This is suggested by the myth of Prajāpati and his sons (SB 8.4.1.4) where Prajāpati was conceived of as agreeing to do the bidding of his sons, whereas they, when asked to do his bidding, were thought to retort, 'What will we gain from it?' (*kim asmākam tataḥ bhavisyati*).

ApSS 11.3.8) or genealogies tracing descent from Vedic seers. The use of such genealogies probably demarcated the unique ritual status of the *śreṣṭha* vis-a-vis others.

Viewed in the context of the conflicts with *bhrātṛvyas* and *sapatnas*, the emphasis on patrilineal and ritual genealogies may have been useful in ensuring the support of kinsmen belonging to different generations as an alternative. The reiteration of such connections also reflects an attempt to ensure continuity and stability for the position of the *śreṣṭha* in a changing socio-political context. At the same time, the emphasis on inter-generational ties as opposed to intra-generational ones was valuable in consolidating claims to material resources—if those who could legitimately claim such resources belonged to different generations, the possibilities of conflicting claims may have been minimized. Besides, the handing down of resources from one generation to the next as opposed to the dispersal in reciprocal exchanges within the same generation, would have provided opportunities for accumulating resources which could then be converted into claims to power and authority. While these possibilities were only partly realized in the context of *śraiṣṭhya*, they provided, to some extent, as we shall see, the basis for the emergence of *rājya*.

VIII

The *śreṣṭha's* role vis-à-vis kinship conflicts was broadened to encompass tensions pertaining to gender stratification as well. While this included ties amongst kinsfolk, in particular husbands and wives, they were also defined in wider terms and related ideally to all men and women. Here, once again, the roles envisaged for the divine *śreṣṭhas* reveal variations, with Indra engaged in battles against women and goddesses, whereas Prajāpati was associated with the more subtle process of arbitrating in favour of men. There is evidence, moreover, of the use of a variety of ritual mechanisms to ensure the establishment and perpetuation of gender stratification as well as for a certain amount of resistance to the process.

In the early Vedic tradition, Indra was assigned a leading role in myths relating to the battle of the sexes. His female opponents

included sorceresses, whose heads were crushed (RV 1.133.2), Vṛtra's mother Dānu (ibid.: 1.32.9), and Uṣas (ibid.: 4.30.9–11), the goddess who is elsewhere (ibid.: 7.79.3) described as wealthy and most Indra-like (*indratamā*). The *devis*, probably the Heaven and Earth, conceived of as twin goddesses, were also reputedly terrorized by his might (ibid.: 5.32.9). Incidentally, the *dāsas* who opposed Indra were thought to use women as weapons (ibid.: 5.30.9) but this evidently proved ineffective. Indra's victories were conceived of as due to his masculinity, *paumsya* (RV 10.59.3), a quality which he was thought to deprive his opponents of (e.g. RV 10.48.2, where the defeated *dasyus* were supposed to have lost their manliness).[56]

While Indra's role was more or less consistent, the fortunes of his wife underwent changes. In a hymn ascribed to her (RV 10.159.6), Śacī Paulomī claimed to control both Indra, her husband, and the *jana* or people at large. What is noteworthy is that she was conceived of as praising herself, unlike Indra and most of the other male gods, who, more often than not, were praised by devotees.[57] If this suggests that her conceptualization was not very popular, this is confirmed by later characterizations of Indrāṇī (whose very name is derived from Indra's) in the ritual tradition, as *avidhavā* (not a widow) and *suputrā* (having good sons, e.g. BSS 1.12, ApSS 2.5.9). Here only a few verses of the *sūkta* ascribed to Śacī Paulomī, which focused on her domesticity, were selected for reiteration, to the exclusion of others. Thus, claims to dominance

[56] The general hostility towards women embedded in Indra's characterization is also evident from the remark (RV 8.33.17) attributed to him: '*Indraḥ cit gha tat abravīt striyaḥ aśāsyam manaḥ utoḥ ai kratum raghum.*' 'Indra himself hath said, the mind of woman brooks not discipline. Her intellect hath little weight' (Griffith 1963: 423). Occasionally, analogies used in connection with Indra also indicate his association with gender stratification. For instance, the ten fingers pressing *soma* for Indra were regarded as *patnīs* or wives serving a *pati* or husband (RV 1.62.10). He was also compared to a *pati* of many women in his exploit of conquering *puras* (ibid.: 7.26.3). However, gender roles are sometimes reversed, Indra being compared to a *yoṣā* (woman) who is desired by the invoker, equated with the *marya* or man (ibid.: 4.20.5).

[57] While they were occasionally conceived of as indulging in self-praise, this is relatively unusual.

were replaced by relatively innocuous and hence desirable attributes of having a husband and sons.

Unlike Indra, Prajāpati was not directly associated with struggles against goddesses or women. However, his role in conflicts justified the subordination of women, although not their extinction. This is evident, for instance, in the myth of Śrī and the *devas* (SB 11.4.3.1–18). Śrī, literally fortune, being produced by Prajāpati, was luminous, bright and trembling. The *devas*, attracted by her qualities, decided to kill her. Prajāpati, however, restrained them saying that a woman ought not to be killed, although her qualities could be appropriated. The *devas* followed his suggestion, leaving Śrī bereft of her qualities and disconsolate. Her appeal to Prajāpati was met with the advice to perform a sacrifice, consisting of offerings to the very gods who had robbed her of her qualities. While Śrī performed the requisite sacrifice and regained these attributes, the man who aspired to acquire them was advised to make offerings to the gods rather than to Śrī (SB 11.4.3.18, 19).

The conflict between Śrī and the gods centres around control of *annādya*, *rājya*, *sāmrājya kṣatra*, *bala*, *brahmavarcas*, *rāṣṭra*, *bhaga*, *puṣṭi* and *rūpa* (SB 11.4.3.3).[58] Access to such qualities was evidently acquiring importance in a situation of socio- political transformation. What the myth probably reflects is an attempt to determine the basis on which such access could be claimed. This is structured along gender lines—while women could have had an inherent or 'natural' access to such attributes, this was effectively challenged, and women who desired such attributes were reduced to the position of supplicants. Moreover, men who aspired to such qualities could legitimize their claims by invoking male gods, who alone could legitimately confer them.

Prajāpati was also conceived of as arbitrating in the dispute between Mind and Speech (Manas and Vāc). While the former was not conceived of as masculine, the latter was explicitly feminine (SB 1.4.5.8–11). Each was thought to claim superiority over the

[58] The terms *rājya*, *sāmrājya* and *rāṣṭra* will be discussed in Chapter IV. The other terms mean the ability to eat, power, strength, priestly lustre, prosperity, nourishment and form, respectively.

other, Mind on the ground that Speech merely imitates and follows it,[59] and Speech on the ground that she makes known and communicates that which Mind knows.[60] They were supposed to have taken their dispute to Prajāpati, who decided in favour of Mind. In protest, Speech refused to carry oblations to Prajāpati. Thus, most offerings to Prajāpati were made silently, without the use of *mantras* (ibid.: 1.4.5.12). In this case, the subordination of the female was thought to rest on Prajāpati's judgment.[61]

The norms of heterosexual relationships were also implicitly and occasionally explicitly justified by being associated with Prajāpati, who was described as giving away his daughter Sūryā or Sāvitrī to Soma *rājā* in marriage (AB 4.17.1). This was evidently regarded as a model which was reiterated in legends and rituals. Elsewhere (BAU 6.4.2), Prajāpati was envisaged as creating women as receptacles for *retas* (sperm), laying down the rules for heterosexual intercourse in the same context. These were based on the assumption that the process could benefit only one of the participants, and sought to ensure the control or dominance of the male partner.

The association of Prajāpati with specific elements of gender stratification implied a widening of the definition of *śraiṣṭhya*. While Indra was conceived of as fighting and defeating individual women, the regulations ascribed to Prajāpati were thought of as being universal, relevant to all women and men.

These notions were frequently reiterated through rituals such as the *soma* sacrifice. This was achieved by denying certain ritual possibilities while enforcing others. For instance, the offering of the *pātnīvat* cups (i.e., the offering of *soma* to the *devas* along with their wives) could not be made with a particular formula known as the *puroruc* (SB 4.4.2.11), as this formula was symbolic of *vīrya* or valour, which would then be conferred on both the divine and the

[59] She is literally *anukarā* and *anuvartmā*.

[60] *Yat vai tvam vettha aham tat vijñapayāmi, aham samjñapayāmi, iti.*

[61] Vāc was in fact the only goddess who was thought to have acquired *śraiṣṭhya* (SSS 15.11.1) on account of her control over the speech of all beings. However, she was more often than not typified as a frivolous woman and was not held up as an ideal for either men or women.

human women, obviously a disastrous possibility from the point of view of the ritual authorities. In the same context, both categories of wives were symbolically emasculated through the use of the *vajra*, Indra's characteristic weapon, and reduced to eunuchs (*niraṣṭa*), and were consequently denied both selfhood and inheritance (*ātman* and *dāya* respectively, ibid.: 4.4.2.13). At the same time, *vīrya*, valour or virility was conferred on the *pumsa* or male (ibid.: 4.4.2.14).[62] The submissiveness of women was also achieved by reciting the verses meant for the wives in a low voice to ensure that the human wife was *aprativādinī*, that is did not retort or protest (AB 3.12.13). An ideal polygynous situation was created by invoking a single male deity before a group of females to ensure that one man had many wives but not vice versa (ibid.: 3.15.3). Besides, as noted earlier, the procreative powers of women were often symbolically appropriated.

Occasionally, the *yajamāna* could give away his daughter as part of the *dakṣiṇā* (ASS 5.3.17); an assertion of his total control over her. This would have also suggested a parallel to Prajāpati's gift of his daughter and implied an extension of the instrumentality associated with women, evident in the procreative symbolism of the ritual. In this case, the daughter could be used to cement ties between the sacrificer and his priest.

At another level, the *dīkṣā* or initiation which prepared the sacrificer for the occasion marked an attempt to recreate the process of childbirth in the ritual context. This was done through the development of an elaborate analogy between the objects used in the sacrifice and the organs involved in the physical process—for instance, the hut in which the sacrificer was placed was regarded as a *yoni* or womb (AB 1.1.3). The consequent 'rebirth' of the sacrificer was viewed as a means of equipping him for participation, duly sanctified, in the realm of the sacred. As in the case of creation myths, this implied a denial of the importance of physical processes. Such tendencies sharpened gender stratification partly by denying

[62] In the course of the *sautrāmaṇī*, which also legitimized *śraiṣṭhya*, the use of woollen thread, spun by women, was considered to be a means of appropriating the *indriya* or power and *vīrya* which was extinct in them (SB 12.7.2.11).

women access to the more socially or ritually desirable forms of birth or rebirth, and partly by belittling the importance of the physical process in which their role was one of undeniable significance.

There are, at the same time, indications that attempts to use the sacrifice as an occasion for defining gender-based relationships met with some resistance. This is suggested by the myth of Aditi and the *soma* sacrifice. The gods were conceived of as excluding her from a share in the sacrifice (SB 3.2.3.1). She 'confused' them to get even, as a result of which they were unable to perform the ritual, until they compromised and agreed to grant her a share.[63]

In other instances, those who opposed the *soma* sacrifice were characterized as *rākṣasīs* or *asurīs* of whom Dīrghajihvī (literally the long-tongued one) was an outstanding example. She was credited as being the destroyer of the sacrifice (*yajñahā*), defiling the sacrificial *soma* by licking it (PVB 13.6.9, AB 2.8.4). Her fate, unlike Aditi's, was grim—she was killed by Indra with the help of a handsome young man, Sumitra.

Unlike the *yajamāna-bhrātṛvya* struggle, the imposition of gender stratification in the process of acquiring or legitimizing *śraiṣṭhya* was not regarded as ambiguous. Moreover, ritual alternatives, such as were envisaged for the *viś*, were not available to women who may have opposed the process. This is to an extent understandable, given the fact that the brahmanical tradition was by and large male dominated. It is also likely that just as inter-generational ties amongst kinsmen were emerging as a source of support for the *śreṣṭha*, so also, the support of men as opposed to women, ensured by emphasizing the difference between the two and placing the latter under the control of the former, was valuable for the *śreṣṭha* in a situation of growing social stratification.

[63] In another version (AB 1.2.1) the sacrifice was thought to have disappeared and was regained through Aditi's assistance. In the case of another goddess, Manotā, her share of the *somā* sacrifice was assigned to Agni (ibid.: 2.6.10), although in an alternative tradition (ApSS 7.24.1), the original offering continued to be recommended. Such variations point to the difficulties in imposing a single consistent norm.

IX

The roles envisaged for the *śreṣṭha* in socio-political conflicts presupposed the existence or development of mechanisms which enabled him to perform these effectively. These mechanisms included devices to acquire the resources necessary to maintain networks of coercion and communication, as well as specific institutions for the latter purposes.

The *śreṣṭha* probably participated directly in a number of exchanges, some of which were embedded in the ritual context. While this may have ensured access to resources, it also meant that the spatial dimension of the network would have been limited. Nevertheless, the emergence of such directional exchanges laid the basis for future developments.

The resources which the *śreṣṭha* acquired through such exchanges are referred to as *bali* and *uddhāra*. The former term had a range of meanings including an offering to the gods, tribute paid by hostile people, or tribute offered by the people in general (Basu 1925: 62). The offering of *bali* to the gods was implicitly meant to placate them and to ensure their benevolence (Gonda 1969: 11) and by extension, *bali* offered to the *śreṣṭha* was probably viewed as a means of winning his favour. The use of an identical term in both contexts underscored the dependent status of the giver of *bali* vis-a-vis its recipient,[64] but may at the same time have implied some obligations on the part of the donor.

There are indications that *bali* may have included food. This is suggested by the use of the verb *upaharati* in the context of offering *bali*, which normally signifies the apportioning or serving of food (Gonda 1969: 12). Besides, the offering of *anna* to the *śreṣṭha* as a form of *bali* is referred to in the course of an analogy (PVB 15.7.3–4) suggesting that this was a common practice.

The receiving of food as a form of *bali* ties in with the emphasis on *annādya* or the ability to eat referred to earlier. It is likely that the giving and receiving of food, implying an access to hospitality,

[64] This corresponds with what Gregory (1982: 52) characterizes as an intra-clan exchange, where donors are viewed as subordinate to recipients.

widened and strengthened the social ties between the *śreṣṭha* and those who offered *bali*. Hence, while the material resources acquired as *bali* were not substantial, an ability to demand and claim it effectively came to be regarded as the hallmark of any successful ruler.[65]

The donors of *bali* are by and large unspecified in the context of *śraiṣṭhya*. This lack of specificity was probably useful in widening claims and incorporating as many social categories as possible within the appropriative network.

The *uddhāra* or special share was evidently claimed by the *śreṣṭha* in return for services rendered. In one episode (AB 3.12.10) Indra was conceived of as demanding and receiving an *uddhāra* from the *devas* after killing Vṛtra and becoming Mahendra (literally the great Indra). He was also thought to receive an *uddhāra* due to the *śreṣṭha* (*śreṣṭhasya uddhāra*) in the *soma* sacrifice in recognition of his role as a destroyer of the *sapatna* (*sapatnaghna*, SB 3.9.4.9). On the human plane, there is an incidental reference to the *viś* giving an *uddhāra* to the *kṣatra* in order to please the latter (ibid.: 9.1.1.15).

The components of *uddhāra* are not specified. However, the demand may have occasionally been oppressive. Indra, for instance, was conceived of as demanding everything from the *devas* as his *uddhāra* (AB 3.12.10), although he later relented when his wife interceded on behalf of the *devas*. This indicates the fluid nature of such exactions, the objects and quantities realized in any given instance probably depending on the relative strength of those involved in the exchange. Besides, there are no indications regarding the regularity of the demands of either *bali* or *uddhāra*, the absence of such specifications probably reflecting a situation in which regular, systematic appropriation was difficult.

That there were problems in establishing claims to productive resources or produce is also suggested by the nature of the *kṣatra-viś* relationship, referred to earlier. It is in this context that the relatively undeveloped nature of mechanisms of coercion, and, to

[65] *Bali* is virtually the only term signifying tax in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Brockington 1984: 63). Given the role of the epic in communicating with a non-specialist audience, the choice of terminology acquires significance.

a lesser extent, communication, associated with the *śreṣṭha* have to be viewed.

The use of coercion to assert and maintain *śraiṣṭhya* is evident from myths as well as from incidental references to the human situation. In one instance (PVB 14.5.15), all *bhūtas* or creatures except a certain sage were conceived of as praising Indra. This was obviously unacceptable, so Indra decided to make the sage fall in line by depriving him of water. Faced with the situation, the sage had no option but to conciliate the angry god by praising him. In an almost identical fashion, Prajāpati was conceived of as seizing the breath of his *prajā* (ibid.: 7.5.2), when they attempted to go away from him, compelling them to accept his *śraiṣṭhya*. This is one of the rare instances in which the divine *śreṣṭhas* were envisaged as adopting more or less similar approaches to problems—depriving their opponents of basic necessities.

A similar ability to exercise control is apparent on the human plane, where, if a man attained *śraiṣṭhya*, people were thought to do as he said (AB 2.7.5). However, there are no indications regarding the exact means of coercion employed in this context. As the human *śreṣṭha* did not have absolute or sole control over basic necessities, the means ascribed to Indra or Prajāpati would not have been available to him. Hence, while the myths may indicate the aspirations of the human *śreṣṭha*, the possibilities open to him in practice were distinctly different.

Indra was conceived of as armed with the equipment of a warrior, typified by the *vajra* or thunderbolt (Choudhuri 1981: 4) and stones or rocks (ibid.) both of which are used effectively in his fight against Vṛtra. More generally he is described as *śakra* or mighty (e.g. RV 8.97.4), as endowed with *kṣatra* (PVB 9.2.7, SB 2.5.4.8), and *vīrya* (PVB 9.7.5, SB 12.7.2.16), and is often described as *śatakratu* (e.g. RV 2.22.4), that is possessed of a hundred powers.[66] To an extent, the exercise of these qualities was legitimized on the

[66] According to Gonda (1959: 37): 'It (i.e. the term *śatakratu*) may rather vaguely be described as a kind of effective mental power or intelligence, mental energy and determination, which enables its possessor to have a solution for a practical difficulty.'

human plane, where these were recognized amongst the attributes which were 'acquired' through the *soma* sacrifice.[67]

However, unlike Indra, the *yajamāna* was not expected to destroy his enemy by demonstrations of valour, but had to employ ritual symbolism instead. This was probably owing to the fact the *bhrātṛvya* or *sapatna* was *within* the social unit in which the *śreṣṭha* operated, hence, his total extermination was not regarded as desirable or possible. As a result, the option of overt violence was eschewed in favour of an assertion of dominance in the ritual context.[68] A similar shift is discernible with reference to gender stratification, where, once again, Indra's explicit acts of aggression were replaced by ritual manipulations.

There was, besides, another dimension of the Indra-Vṛtra struggle which was not extended to the human plane. In many versions of the myth, in both the early and the later Vedic context, Indra was conceived of as destroying Vṛtra with the assistance of the Maruts, so much so that Marutvat is one of the common epithets of the deity. Their support was occasionally rewarded with a *bhāga* or share of the *soma* sacrifice (AB 3.12.9)[69] and they were recognized as *sacivas*, that is friends or companions of the god.

Nevertheless, as noted earlier, the relationship between Indra and the Maruts was often viewed as less than harmonious, especially in the later Vedic tradition. In fact, on one occasion (RV 1.165.6, 8) they were derided for their eagerness to accompany Indra to the sacrifice, while they did not join him in the battlefield.

The transformation of the Indra-Maruts relationship in the context of the Indra-Vṛtra struggle probably reflects one of the

[67] These included *vīrya* (PVB 4.5.21, AB 1.1.5), *ojas* (strength) and *indriya* (prowess, AB 1.1.5).

[68] It is also important to bear in mind that an exclusive dependence on military control had its limits in ancient (Mann 1986: 26) as in most modern societies. While overt force can ensure a measure of temporary control, its maintenance on a long-term basis often runs into problems. As opposed to this, the exercise of power through ideology is often more effective and enduring, even if its initial manifestation is less dramatic.

[69] In this context the term retains its earlier meaning of a share to be distributed, as opposed to the later meaning of a tax.

fundamental tensions of contemporary society. As long as Vṛtra epitomized the outsider—whether a hostile natural force or a human enemy—a more or less unified body was prepared to oppose and vanquish him. When, however, the enemy was viewed as existing within society, a unified response was no longer possible, as the enemy from one social perspective could turn out to be a friend from another. In such a situation, the lack of references to the supporters of the *śreṣṭha* on the human plane is understandable.

In this context, the intervention of the human *śreṣṭha* in socio-political conflicts would have been an important means of ensuring support from those whose cause or aspirations were upheld by the *śreṣṭha*. The sacrifice, which provided an occasion for reiterating and legitimizing claims to *śraiṣṭhya*, was, at the same time, a crucial mechanism whereby the human *śreṣṭha* fulfilled his roles and communicated information regarding them. It is significant that there are virtually no references to other means of communication apart from the sacrificial context. It is in this situation that attempts to legitimize *śraiṣṭhya* acquire significance.

X

The problem of the 'acquisition' or the legitimate transfer of *śraiṣṭhya* was discussed in myths. Some of these attempted to connect the two divine *śreṣṭhas*, Indra and Prajāpati. The latter was regarded as the initial *śreṣṭha* who indicated his position by donning a wreath (*sraja*, PVB 16.4.1–3). He then conferred the wreath on Indra, who was consequently accepted as the *śreṣṭha* by the rest of the *prajā*. The myth reflects the tendency to coalesce the distinctive attributes of Prajāpati and Indra. This may have been a means of uniting the followers of distinct beliefs, integrating diverse possibilities of social action. Besides, the envisaged transfer of *śraiṣṭhya* from father to son would have legitimized the association of *śraiṣṭhya* with patriliny referred to earlier. Nevertheless, the mythical transfer was not viewed as automatic, requiring, as it did, the acknowledgement of the *prajā*. Besides, it did not imply primogeniture.

In another myth (SB 8.3.1.3), the *devas* were thought to have

conferred *śraiṣṭhya* on Indra and Agni in return for services rendered.[70] This suggests an implicit contract, which, however, had no parallel on the human plane. Thus, the legitimacy of popular control over the process of conferring *śraiṣṭhya* was marginalized.

The ability to perform a sacrifice was recognized as a means of attaining *śraiṣṭhya* in a myth where the gods were conceived of as engaged in a *sattra* (SB 14.1.1.4), agreeing that he who finished first would be acknowledged as a *śreṣṭha*. Viṣṇu, identified with Āditya, was thought to have acquired *śraiṣṭhya* in this context (ibid.: 14.1.1.5–6). This theme was the one most commonly reiterated in explicitly human situations.[71]

While both Indra and Prajāpati were closely associated with the sacrifice, there was a fundamental difference in the nature of the connection. Indra was occasionally characterized as the protector (PVB 13.6.9, AB 2.7.6, SB 1.4.5.3) and enjoyer of the sacrifice including the *soma* sacrifice in particular (PVB 9.4.15, AB 2.8.5). Besides, he was regarded as the deity of the sacrifice in general (*yajñasya devatā*, AB 5.25.9, SB 1.4.1.33), emerging as its patron.[72] Prajāpati, on the other hand, was totally identified with the sacrifice (PVB 7.2.1, AB 2.7.7, SB 6.4.1.6, BAU 3.9.6 etc.). In the ritual context, both these possibilities were envisaged for the *yajamāna* who was identified with Indra (e.g. SB 2.6.4.8) or Prajāpati (e.g. AB 2.7.8). Apart from explicitly ascribing divinity to the *yajamāna*, such identifications suggested control over sacred activities.

The basic *soma* sacrifice or *agniṣṭoma* (literally hymns in praise of Agni), which legitimized *śraiṣṭhya* (PVB 6.3.9, AB 1.1.5 etc.)

[70] Here, the *devas* are depicted as being unable to lay down the bricks required for the sacrificial altar. Indra and Agni were requested to help. They wanted to know what they would gain in return and were informed that they would be recognized as *śreṣṭhas*.

[71] Other recommended means of acquiring *śraiṣṭhya* included knowledge of myths (e.g. PVB 7.5.3) or mystical insight (e.g. BAU 6.1.1) or of the *yajus* and *sāmans* (ibid.: 5.13.2, 3). While such 'means' did not have immediate social or political relevance, they indicate the importance of *śraiṣṭhya* as an ideal, as it was extended to express the highest conceivable attainment in a range of contexts.

[72] In one instance (SB 1.2.4.1, 2) the major sacrificial tools, the wooden sword and the sacrificial post, were regarded as parts of the *vajra* with which Indra killed Vṛtra.

was fairly simple, lasting for three days and requiring the slaughter of a single animal (Drury 1981: 25). Despite its relatively unostentatious character, the sacrifice was recognized as prestigious (AB 3.14.1), probably owing to its antiquity (Eggeling 1963a: xv).

While the use of *soma* for sacrificial purposes was an integral part of the early Vedic tradition, there are indications that the *soma* sacrifice as prescribed in the later Vedic tradition was the outcome of several modifications and elaborations. For instance, the performance of the *agniṣṭoma* was recommended as this was described as the means whereby Prajāpati acquired *śraiṣṭhya* (PVB 6.3.9). This was clearly a new development, connecting a deity who was virtually unknown in the *Ṛg Veda* to a popular ritual.

Indra's links with the ritual as it evolved was also the subject of some discussion, evident from the speculation on the number of potsherds to be used in the ritual, which was resolved in favour of the number eleven, symbolic of Indra (AB 2.8.5).[73] The paucity of verses addressed to Indra amongst those employed in the ritual was also remarked upon (ibid.: 6.28.2), and a way out was found by stating that any verse containing the words 'drink' or 'protect' was in reality symbolic of and addressed to Indra. Thus, a deliberate attempt was made to connect the deity with the ritual.[74]

The *soma* sacrifice, as we have seen, provided an important occasion for ceremonial exchanges and for communicating values of socio-political significance, relating to the *varṇa* hierarchy, bonds amongst kinsmen and gender stratification. The weaving together of these concerns, and specific perspectives regarding them, were sanctified through their reiteration in the context of what was,

[73] Of the alternative numbers, eight and twelve, the first was symbolic of the *gāyatrī* metre, *brahma* and Agni, and the second of the *jagata* metre, *viś* and Viśvedevas. The chosen number, eleven, represented the *triṣṭubh* metre, *kṣatra*, and Indra.

[74] Such modifications were not very easily achieved. Thus the obvious expedient of incorporating verses referring directly to Indra was not adopted. Besides, the offering to the Viśvedevas preceded the one to Indra in the animal sacrifice of the ritual. As Eggeling (1963a: xix) remarks: 'We have probably to assume that this order was too firmly established by long usage to have been easily altered.'

initially at least, a popular ritual. Nevertheless, the very element of popular participation, though valuable from the perspective of communication, became problematic when attempts were made to utilize the occasion to disseminate messages of socio-political differentiation and to enforce or legitimize such differences.

It was in this context that variations in the *soma* sacrifice were recommended as a means of attaining *śraiṣṭhya*. Generally, the variations lengthened the duration of the sacrifice, during which more complex combinations of chants and rituals were used. Besides, they required larger quantities of *dakṣiṇā*. Such variations included the *gārgatrirātra* (PVB 21.2.4), *dvādaśāha* (AB 4.19.3), *udbhit* (BSS 18.31), *navarātra* (ASS 10.3.22), *viśvajit-agniṣṭoma* (ApSS 22.1.6) and the *vācastoma* (SSS 15.11.8).

The tendency to use a more complicated ritual had a number of implications. It would have narrowed down the number of claimants to *śraiṣṭhya*, as only those who had access to additional resources would have been able to perform it. It would have also implied a greater dependence on priestly expertise.[75] Besides, popular participation may have been effectively restricted, as commoners may have found it difficult to be present continuously during lengthy rituals. As such, they would have lost control over the communication process associated with such rituals, and would have been increasingly thrust into the receiving end, having roles assigned to them rather than participating on their own terms. What would have been communicated through such complex rituals was thus a clearer message of dominance and subordination.[76]

The position of the *śreṣṭha* thus developed in relation to a situation of social differentiation, reflected in attempts to widen the scope of his power and authority from the limited definition in terms of more or less equal groups to a vaguer definition which was

[75] In fact, the very codification of the sacrificial cult, reflected in the brahmanical texts, emphasizing a single 'proper' method of performing the rituals, would have strengthened priestly control over the sacrifice.

[76] The use of the sacrifice thus envisaged constitutes an example of the immanent role of ideology, 'grappling intellectually, morally and aesthetically with given power relations, and, in its success, strengthening them' (Mann 1986: 157).

potentially all-encompassing. The access the *śreṣṭha* had to material resources also incorporated a similar range of possibilities. In a sense, the ascription of the same position to both Indra and Prajāpati, each endowed with distinctive features, was symbolic of the process of expanding the definition of *śraiṣṭhya*. As suggested earlier, Indra and Prajāpati were in all likelihood associated with different traditions, which were deliberately fused to create a unified belief system.

While efforts to identify specific elements of the unified tradition with one or the other strand can be problematic, certain shifts in beliefs provide an indication of processes related to its emergence. The shifts which were significant include a growing emphasis on defining the *varṇa* hierarchy, defining relationships amongst kinsmen, and systematic efforts to enforce gender stratification. As we have seen, discussion on these themes reveals departures from or modifications of the perspectives reflected in the early Vedic tradition, and in the case of *varṇa*, a virtually new development.

Perhaps the most striking example of the process is the reconceptualization of the Indra-Vṛtra myth, whereby an enemy who was earlier recognized as an embodiment of unqualified evil was transformed into a potentially positive force, whose qualities had to be appropriated. If one views the Indra-Vṛtra struggle as reflected in the early Vedic tradition as one between those regarded as insiders and outsiders, then the shift in later Vedic mythology may reflect a blurring of such distinctions and a tendency to amalgamate different social groups.

Such a process of amalgamation would have necessarily been complex, and would have involved changes in the social organization of previously opposed groups, evident in the rehabilitation of Vṛtra. It would have also sharpened social stratification, whether structured along *varṇa*, kinship or gender lines, as issues of relative social status tend to acquire greater significance in such situations, where the norms and practices of one social group may present an implicit or explicit challenge to the others. It is in this context that the *śreṣṭha* emerged, claiming an ability to define social norms, attempting to enforce such definitions by asserting control over possibly the most prestigious networks of exchange, and through

rituals such as the *soma* sacrifice, which provided an occasion for communicating such definitions.

However, the difficulties inherent in arriving at or enforcing any single set of norms, evident in ritual variations and in myths, indicates that the emergence of *śraiṣṭhya* did not resolve or contain the social tensions or conflicts which prevailed. As we shall see, other attempts were made to grapple with the situation. These were characterized by a variety of different approaches towards the issues which were assuming centrality.

all this should be connected to historical evidence = social change or seen in Kingship, Kingdoms, Fire, etc. should be seen in the light of śraiṣṭhya

Indra - pastoral God
- warlike
- destroyer of evil

Prajapati - agrarian God
- procreative and protective powers
- conciliator of totality of existing forms, beings

Chapter Three

Assimilation, Marginalization, Adaptation: Towards a Composite Ideal

The *kṣatriya* anointed with the *aindramahābhiṣeka* wins all victories, finds all worlds, attains *śraiṣṭhya, atiṣṭhā, paramatā* over all *rājās* and having won *sāmrājya, bhaujya, svārājya, vairājya, pārameṣṭhya, rājya, māhārājya* and *ādhipatya* . . . becomes immortal.

Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.

I

The exploration of alternative concepts of political power was a unique feature of the later Vedic tradition, contrasting both with the preceding phase in which problems of definition were probably unimportant, and the post-Vedic brahmanical tradition, dominated by a single definition of legitimate power and authority in terms of *rājya.* Such alternatives probably reflect the fluidity and tension characteristic of a situation of transition.

The discussion on these possibilities ranges from cursory references to more detailed analyses, indicating that not all of them were regarded as equally important. Besides, the extent to which they were incorporated within the definition of *rājya* also reveals significant variations. Both the elements which were included as well as those which were excluded are useful in focusing attention on political processes related to the emergence of *rājya.* With this in view, we will examine three of the most important alternatives, viz., *ādhipatya, vairājya* and *svārājya.*

While the sources of information available are broadly similar to those regarding *śraiṣṭhya,* there are certain variations. On the mythical plane, *ādhipatya, vairājya,* and *svārājya* were associated

with a variety of deities, including goddesses. For instance, *vairājya* was ascribed to Indra (SSS 8.17.2), Agni (ApSS 5.15.2), Sarasvat (ibid.: 5.11.6), Mitra (SSS 14.30.1), Soma (SB 3.3.2.17), Aditi (ibid.: 2.2.1.20), Vāc (ibid.: 3.5.1.34) and Śrī (ibid.: 11.4.3.18). While this indicates its importance, it also renders the task of delineating the characteristics typical of the *virāj* more difficult than in the case of the *śreṣṭha* or the *rājā*.

The problem is, if possible, further complicated by the frequent association of *ādhipatya* with Agni (e.g. PVB 6.7.2–3, AB 3.14.4, SB 9.3.3.11), one of the few gods who retained a position of importance in the early Vedic and post-Vedic tradition (Pandey 1969: 36, Aguilar 1976: 113). However, he was associated with other positions of status as well,[1] and was regarded as the archetypal divine priest or *hotṛ* (e.g. RV 5.1.7, PVB 24.13.5, AB 1.5.2, SB 1.3.3.13). Hence his characteristics may reflect those expected of the human priest as much as, if not more than, those of the *adhipati*. It is in this context that incidental references to the conduct or activities of human *adhipatis* assume significance.

The evidence from rituals is also uneven—while a number of sacrifices were associated with the acquisition of *ādhipatya* amongst other things, virtually none were prescribed for the attainment of *vairājya*. I will argue that the extent of ritualization was related to specific features typical of each position.

Where sacrifices were prescribed, these included variations of the soma sacrifice (e.g. the *ṛṣabha ekāha* and the *pṛṣṭha ṣaḍaha* for *ādhipatya*, PVB 19.12.3, 13.9.23) and *sattras* (e.g. PVB 23.14.3). While the implications of variations in the *soma* sacrifice have been referred to earlier (Chapter II), the use of *sattras* opened up certain new possibilities.

In the case of the *virāj* an identical term was employed for a metre used in the ritual context, where specificity and accuracy were highly valued and recognized as essential for ensuring success,

[1] For instance, he was described as a *rājā* (e.g. RV 6.4.4, SB 2.3.4.29), *samrāj* (RV 3.55.7, PVB 1.4.2, SB 2.4.1.8, ApSS 6.2.1), *svarāj* (SB 7.5.1.31), *viśpati* (RV 2.1.8), *nṛpati* (RV 2.1.1), *virāj* (ApSS 5.15.2) and *śreṣṭha* (RV 1.161.1, BSS 26.33, ApSS 5.24.4).

suggesting that the connotations of the position of status and the metre were more or less similar.[2]

As in the case of the *śreṣṭha*, there are virtually no references to specific human *adhipatis*, *virājs* or *svarājs*. As suggested earlier, this points to a reluctance to preserve the memory of such men (and possibly women). Nevertheless, sacrifices such as the *rājasūya* and *aindramahābhiṣeka* which legitimized *rājya*, were viewed as a means of 'acquiring' the attributes associated with these positions (e.g. SSS 15.12.1), indicating an effort to widen the definition of *rājya* so as to encompass a range of possibilities. It is in this context that an understanding of these terms acquires relevance.

II

The term *adhipati* is frequently interpreted as ruler, lord, king, sovereign (e.g. SED: s.v., PSED: s.v.). Unlike the definitions of *śraiṣṭhya*, those of *ādhipatya* incorporated a range of categories or spheres over which the *adhipati* (and occasionally, on the divine plane, the *adhipatnī*) was expected to exercise control or influence. These included categories with which the *adhipati* was intrinsically connected, as well as others. However, *ādhipatya* was rarely articulated in terms of the comprehensiveness associated with Prajāpati in the context of *śraiṣṭhya*.

The notion of control over related categories was worked out through myths as well as through incidental references to the human situation. On the divine plane, Sūrya or the sun was regarded as the *adhipati* of the *viśvajyotis* ('all-light') bricks used in the *agnicayana* (SB 8.7.1.22), and Indra of the *devas* (ApSS 14.3.5), a common substratum linking the deity with the categories over whom he was conceived of as exercising *ādhipatya*. This was reiterated on the human plane, where the *adhipati*, like the *śreṣṭha*, was occasionally defined in terms of *samānas* or equals (PVB

[2] 'Since the name and the thing named are in so-called primitive and archaic thought much more intimately associated than modern men are accustomed to accept, identity of names was widely considered to point to identity of essence' (Gonda 1984: 60).

6.2.9, BSS 18.43) and *manusyas* or men in general (PVB 19.12.3, ApSS 14.3.5).[3]

The other possibility was characterized by a degree of differentiation between the *adhipati* and his dependents. This is exemplified on the mythical plane in the notion of Prajāpati as the *adhipati* of *prajā* (SB 8.4.3.3), Brahmaṇaspati as the *adhipati* of *brahma* (*varṇa*) (ibid.: 8.4.3.4) and Bhūtānāmpati as the *adhipati* of *bhūtas* or creatures (ibid.: 8.4.3.5).

This was reinforced through incidental references to the human situation as well, with *puruṣa* or man being conceived of as the *adhipati* of *paśus* (PVB 6.2.7), being distinguished by their different methods of eating—men eat with their heads erect, while animals eat with their heads bent down (ibid.: 6.2.8–9). Elsewhere (AB 7.34.2), *ādhipatya* was defined as the control exercised by the *kṣatriya* over *prajā*.

Occasionally, especially in the human situation, attempts were made to fuse or equate these inherently contradictory definitions in terms of similar and subordinate groups, the *adhipati* and his *samānas* being equated with the *rājanya* and the *viś* (PVB 19.12.3–5). This probably reflects the problems inherent in conceptualizing a changing socio-political situation in terms of existing definitional categories. More specifically, it would indicate that a more or less egalitarian situation was giving way to a stratified social order, corresponding with a change in the attributes associated with leaders or rulers.

A further definitional possibility, related to the process of social differentiation, is evident in the conceptualization of *ādhipatya* in terms of social, including *varṇa*, categories, Indra being characterized as the *adhipati* of *kṣatra* (SB 8.4.3.10), while the female divinities of the Day and Night (Ahorātra) were regarded as *adhipatnīs* of the *śūdra* and *ārya* respectively (ibid.: 8.4.3.12).[4] This possibility was, however, not elaborated or developed in either the

[3] A prayer could also be offered to attain *ādhipatya* over *prajā* (PGS 1.3.15).

[4] In the same context Aditi is referred to as the *adhipatnī* of the *pitṛs* (SB 8.4.3.7). All the divine *adhipatnīs* were conceived of as exercising power in their own right.

mythical or the ritual context. What is likely is that while some members of each social category may have attempted to assert leadership over at least their own group, such attempts were not systematically validated, even though they were occasionally recognized. This is not surprizing, as the legitimation of such possibilities would have weakened the position of those who aspired to control the entire social order. At the same time, the limited recognition accorded to these claims reflects the socio-political importance of the claimants. Hence, while such definitions could be marginalized, they could not be totally eliminated.

At another level, there was a tendency to define *ādhipatya* on both the divine and the human plane in terms of control over economic resources. Bṛhaspati, for example, was regarded as the *adhipati* of domesticated animals (*grāmya paśu*, SB 8.4.3.11), Varuṇa of one-hoofed animals (ibid.: 8.4.3.13), Pūṣan of small animals (ibid.: 8.4.3.14), Vāyu of wild animals (ibid.: 8.4.3.15) and Soma of plants (ibid.: 8.4.3.17).

In the human context, likewise, *ādhipatya* over both kinds of animals, domesticated and wild (*grāmya* and *āraṇya* respectively), was asserted through ritual variations (PVB 13.5.20, 23.13.2). Besides, the possibility of *annasya ādhipatya* (i.e. *ādhipatya* over food, PVB 22.9.3), and, more comprehensively, *sarvasya annādasya ādhipatya* (i.e. *ādhipatya* over the ability to eat all kinds of food, ibid.: 23.14.3) was envisaged.

The definition of *ādhipatya*, like *śraiṣṭhya*, in terms of grain and animals, implied a claim to monopolize the use and/or ownership of such produce or productive resources. While the literal implementation of such assertions may not have been feasible, they suggest that an attempt was made to define the basis of power in terms of access to and control over material resources.

Divine *ādhipatya* was often defined in terms of spatial categories, with Sūrya, Vāyu and Agni being referred to as the *adhipatis* of the three worlds (*lokas*, PVB 6.7.2–3). Elsewhere (SB 14.1.3.21–23), Savitṛ, Dhātṛ and Bṛhaspati were described as the *adhipatis* of the earth, while in another instance (SSS 6.3.1–7), divine *adhipatis* were assigned control of various directions. Although such notions were not developed into a concept of territoriality on either the divine

or the human plane, they represent a tendency to define *ādhipatya* in relatively more concrete terms than *śraiṣṭhya*.

The association of *ādhipatya* with specific categories, whether social, economic or spatial, marked an attempt to lend substance to definitions of control. To some extent, this is reflected in the very use of the suffix *pati*. As Gonda (1965: 135) observes: 'The Indo-European *poti*-s, though translated by 'lord, master', obviously denoted the one who holds rule over definite people, over definite objects, who wields power over a department or special sphere of influence.'

It was probably this association with tangible definitions of power that gave *ādhipatya* its unique importance, and explains its incorporation amongst the goals envisaged in sacrifices such as the *rājasūya* and the *vājapeya*.

III

If the spheres of influence delimited for the *adhipati* were different from those of the *śreṣṭha*, the role envisaged for the former in the economy reveals certain broadly similar concerns. For instance, cosmogonic speculation was incorporated into Agni's mythology, although this was not developed as systematically or elaborately as in the case of Prajāpati.[5]

In the early Vedic tradition, Agni was virtually never associated with cosmogonic speculation. In fact, the creation of Agni from two pieces of wood, often referred to as his mothers (e.g. RV 1.31.2, 3.1.7) is frequently alluded to. In the later Vedic tradition, on the other hand, he was himself involved in creation, conceived of as stimulating or supporting the process. In one instance (SB 2.2.4.1–7), Prajāpati was thought to undertake creative activity in order to appease the hunger of Agni, the first-born, whereas in another myth (AB 3.13.10) Agni was conceived of as blowing on (and presumably

[5] While Agni is not explicitly referred to as an *adhipati* in this context, some of the sacrifices which legitimized *ādhipatya* such as the *dvādaśāha* were amongst those with cosmogonic connotations. As such, claims to further cosmic activity constituted a facet of *ādhipatya*. The speculation on Agni's cosmogonic role may have implicitly reinforced this.

purifying) the sperm of Prajāpati, released on account of his desire for his daughter, this in turn resulting in the creation of animals. In both instances, Agni was connected with Prajāpati, the creator god par excellence, and thus linked with cosmogonies with which he was not otherwise associated. Agni was also independently linked to the generative aspects of creation, being considered responsible for the growth of plants (AB 1.2.1, SB 1.6.1.8).

As the sacrifice was amongst the devices most commonly associated with creation, it was inevitable that the sacrificial fire and its invocation would be invested with cosmogonic significance. Thus the *agnihotra* or the daily offering into the fire was thought to produce everything (SB 2.3.4.8), being a means of attaining the *samvatsara* or year, symbolic of totality (ibid.: 2.3.3.18), the sacrificial fire being conceived of as extending to the three worlds (ibid.: 2.1.4.11).[6]

Such associations were more systematically reiterated in the rituals which legitimized *ādhipatya*, including variations of the *soma* sacrifice such as the six-day *pṛṣṭha ṣaḍaha* (PVB 13.9.23), the twelve-day *dvādaśāha* (BSS 18.19), the 'bull-like' *soma* sacrifice (*ṛṣabha ekāha*, PVB 19.12.3) and the *vācastoma* named after the hymn to Vāc (SSS 15.11.1). The deliberate building up of the cosmogonic role of the *adhipati* would have meant that he, like the *śreṣṭha*, would have been regarded as instrumental in ensuring the very basis of material prosperity.

At another level, a number of divine *adhipatis* were invoked for the protection of what may be broadly defined as the environment. For instance, Varuṇa (SB 8.4.2.6) was invoked for the protection of the rain and wind, the Rudras (ibid.: 8.4.2.7) for four-footed creatures, the Maruts (ibid.: 8.4.2.8) for the *garbha* or embryo, Bṛhaspati (ibid.: 8.4.2.10) for the directions, Ayavas (ibid.: 8.4.2.11) for *prajā*, while the Viśvedevas were to protect all *bhūtas* or beings (ibid.: 8.4.2.12). Although not explicitly reiterated in the ritual context, the depiction of the *adhipati* as protector possibly reinforced the belief that *ādhipatya* was indeed beneficial to those who acceded to it.

[6] The entire temporal framework was also encompassed within the ritual (SB 2.3.1.24).

Besides, both the divine and the human *adhipati* were conceived of as either wealthy or aspiring to acquire wealth. The typical divine *adhipati*, Agni, was frequently described as *rayipati* or lord of wealth (RV 2.9.4, ApSS 6.13.2) and *puṣṭipati* or the lord of nourishment (ApSS 6.13.2).

In the ritual context, the *soma* sacrifice and its variants were, as noted earlier, viewed as especially suitable for the *paśukāma* and the *annādyakāma*. Other recognized means for acquiring *ādhipatya* over material resources included the use of the *pārtha sāman* (PVB 13.5.20) by means of which Pṛthu Vaiṇya, a legendary ruler, was supposed to have obtained *ādhipatya* over both domesticated and wild animals.

What is more interesting is the recommendation of *sattras* for the acquisition or legitimization of such control. These included the *viṃśarātra* or twenty-day *soma* sacrifice, by which *ādhipatya* over *anna* was ensured (PVB 23.14.3). The *gavām ayana*, a year long *sattra* meant to confer *ādhipatya*, was also regarded as a means of acquiring *samṛddhi* or prosperity and *paśu* (ibid.: 4.7.3, 8).

The use of *sattras* assumes significance in view of their distinctive characteristics. The term itself is unknown in the *Ṛg Veda* (VI: s.v.). While it has often been viewed as a vestige of communal sacrifices, the elements emphasized in the later Vedic tradition strengthened the bonds between those who actually participated in the ritual to the exclusion of others. This is suggested by its very duration, a *sattra* being, by definition, any *soma* sacrifice which lasted for more than twelve days. As we have seen, longer sacrifices reduced the opportunities for the active participation of common people, and, as such, *sattras* would have in all likelihood been exclusive affairs.

Besides, theoretically, all participants were supposed to be of equal status, and each one was expected to benefit in an identical fashion. As an extension of this, there was no provision for the giving or receiving of *dakṣiṇā* (BSS 19.5). Hence, *sattras* reinforced the shared common interest of those who performed them. In terms of access to material resources, this was probably a means of supporting and legitimizing one another's claims and evolving a new basis of defining control over productive resources or produce, as

ownership was now symbolically vested in a finite, well-defined group of people.

The performance of *sattras* gradually fell into disfavour, with alternatives being recommended. In one instance (SB 12.1.3.23), the potential *sattrin* was advised to strive to attain the fruits of the sacrifice through truthfulness, effort, austerity, faith, sacrifice and offerings, whereas in other cases, routine household rituals such as the *agnihotra* (ibid.: 12.4.1.1) and the *pañcamahāyajñas* (ibid.: 11.5.6.1) were equated with *sattras*. Such equations suggest that while the symbolic importance of *sattras* continued to be recognized, their actual performance was avoided. This ambiguity reflects a changing situation, in which established ritual practices could not be overtly challenged, although their continued performance was viewed as undesirable. The attempt of the brahmanical authors to distance themselves from this form of sacrifice was probably due to the fact that some of the participants may have belonged to non-priestly categories, and as such, the ritual, by suggesting an inherent equality of status, would have run counter to the tendency to legitimize social differences. Hence, this aspect of *ādhipatya* was not developed further. Besides, as we will see subsequently (Chapter 7), it is also likely that most communities had specialized priests and the problem of claiming recognition as *brāhmaṇas* or being accorded such recognition was a persistent one. In such a situation, the attitude towards rituals which may have been developed by and/or were performed by non-brahmanical priests would have been somewhat ambivalent. The fate of *sattras* may have been connected with this possibility as well.

The relationship envisaged between *ādhipatya* and procreation was broadly similar to that of the *śreṣṭha*. Like Indra, Agni was regarded as the embodiment of masculinity, being literally *nṛtama*, the most masculine of men (RV 4.5.2)[7] and was invoked throughout the brahmanical tradition for granting progeny in general (e.g. RV 6.13.6, PGS 1.5.11) and sons in particular (e.g.

[7] The daily *agnihotra* was also equated with *retas* or semen (ApSS 6.6.1) and was regarded as a means of obtaining sons (SSS 2.9.8, ApSS 6.6.4) or offspring (SB 2.2.4.7, BSS 3.7, SSS 2.14.2, ApSS 6.8.4).

RV 6.13.6, SSS 4.13.1, ApSS 6.6.4). Moreover, the very establishment of the sacrificial fire was associated with procreation (ASS 2.3.27, SSS 2.13.4, ApSS 5.8.8). As suggested earlier, the invocation of a male god and the emphasis on masculinity tended to ritualize procreation, and was a means of asserting male control over the process.

The conceptualization of the human *adhipati* also reinforced masculine imagery, evident in the equation of the *adhipati* with the *ṛṣabha* or bull (PVB 19.12.3), the embodiment of virility. Besides, rituals which legitimized *ādhipatya* such as the *dvādaśāha* (PVB 11.3.5, AB 4.19.1, BSS 16.4, ASS 10.5.12), *gavām ayana* (PVB 4.3.7–8, SSS 13.28.4) and the *duraśa* (BSS 18.42), were all viewed as a means of obtaining *prajā*. The ritual devices used included the *mithuna* employed in the *soma* sacrifice and its variants (e.g. AB 5.24.4) and in the *gavām ayana* (PVB 4.2.18).

If the concern for acquiring *prajā*, *paśu* and *anna* was common to the *adhipati* and the *śreṣṭha*, there was a certain difference in the use envisaged for such resources. On the divine plane, invocations to Agni for economic support are characteristic of both the early and the later Vedic tradition (RV 2.1.7., BSS 2.16, SSS 2.13.4). However, Agni was not regarded as an *adhipati* in any of these cases. In other words, there was no explicit obligation to be generous associated with definitions of *ādhipatya* in myths. This is corroborated by the evidence on the human plane, where there are no indications that the *adhipati* was expected to be generous.

The *adhipati* was, nevertheless, involved in certain exchanges in the sacrificial context. These included the giving of *dakṣiṇā*, which required significantly larger numbers of animals than in the case of the *śreṣṭha*, as, apart from the *sattras*, the other rites prescribed for legitimizing *ādhipatya* were longer, more complicated versions of the *soma* sacrifice (e.g. LSS 9.4.20). Given the significance of such exchanges in furthering the process of social differentiation, it is likely that *ādhipatya*, even more than *śraiṣṭhya*, contributed to the accentuation of socio-economic difference. At another level, the very performance of such complex rituals would have entailed a greater outlay of wealth in ceremonial displays and ritual exchanges. At the same time, the exclusive claim of the *adhipati* to some

economic resources may have made his position less socially acceptable than the *śreṣṭha's*, who at least theoretically attempted to ensure the welfare of his dependents.

IV

As in the sphere of the economy, the roles envisaged for the *adhipati* in society run, in part, parallel to those of the *śreṣṭha*. However, these are relatively less developed, and, in some cases, suggest an imitation of the functions of the *śreṣṭha* rather than an independent development. While the 'shallow' social role of the *adhipati* is in itself significant, the elements which were incorporated from the definition of *śraiṣṭhya* point to the importance of certain issues or conflicts in contemporary society.

To start with the issue of *varṇa*, the divine *adhipatis* were virtually never associated with the creation of the hierarchy, although they were occasionally invoked to protect specific categories. For instance, Vāc, as *adhipatnī*, was invoked to protect *brahma* (SB 8.4.2.3), Viṣṇu to protect *kṣatra* (ibid.: 8.4.2.4) and Dhātṛ to protect the *viś* (ibid.: 8.4.2.5). In each case, what was desired was the freeing of the particular category from evil and death—what is noteworthy is that the benefits sought were not hierarchically ordered according to *varṇa*. Hence, while different social categories were recognized as existing, enforcing or maintaining social differences was not regarded as intrinsic to *ādhipatya*.

On the divine plane, moreover, the *varṇa* affiliation of the typical *adhipati*, Agni, was by no means finally settled. For instance, he was often regarded as the representative of the priestly category and was conceived of as symbolic of its supremacy (e.g. BSS 18.35, SSS 14.29.2). Elsewhere (SB 2.4.3.6, 6.6.1.7), he symbolized the *kṣatra*, and in this capacity was conceived of as ensuring its dominance over the *viś* represented by the Ādityas and Maruts. Other divine *adhipatis* such as Indra (SB 8.4.3.10) were also regarded as representative of the *kṣatra*, a possibility which was evidently well-known on the human plane, where the *adhipati* was equated with the *rājanya* in analogies (PVB 19.12.3).

The use of modifications of the *soma* sacrifice for legitimizing

ādhipatya would have meant a broad reiteration of the concerns regarding *varṇa* embedded in the ritual. Besides, the *ṛṣabha ekāha* was viewed as a means of attaching the *viś* to the *kṣatra* (PVB 19.12.6), it being rendered *anapakrāmukā* (i.e. not-wandering) in that context, while the *gavām ayana* included a mock battle between the *śūdra* and the *ārya* (PVB 5.5.14) in which the latter was to emerge victorious. This would have made the status of the *śūdra* in the *varṇa* order explicit.[8] By and large, however, upholding or defining the *varṇa* hierarchy was not central to *ādhipatya*.

The intervention of the *adhipati* in kin-based conflicts also generally reiterated the concerns associated with Indra and the human *śreṣṭha*. Thus, attempts to assign a role to Agni in the conflict against Vṛtra rarely extended beyond the occasional use of the epithet *vṛtrahan* (e.g. RV 1.74.3). He was occasionally referred to as an *adhipati* (e.g. AB 3.14.4) in myths relating to his fight against the *asuras*. As Vṛtra and the *asuras* were frequently equated with hostile kinsmen, it is not surprizing that Agni was invoked in the daily *agnihotra* to destroy the *sapatna* and the *bhrātṛvya* (BSS 3.8, ApSS 6.20.2). At another level, destroying such enemies was a recurrent theme in the *soma* sacrifice and its variants.

The incorporation of the *deva-asura*/Vṛtra and *yajamāna-bhrātṛvya* or *sapatna* struggle into the notion of *ādhipatya* at a variety of levels points to its importance in the contemporary context. However, other dimensions of kinship relations were not systematically absorbed. For instance, while paternalism was a characteristic of Agni throughout the brahmanical tradition (e.g. RV 2.1.9, ApSS 5.16.1), this was not directly related to *ādhipatya*, and although rituals legitimizing the institution would have reiterated the patrilineal connections of the *adhipati*, this was not explicitly emphasized.[9]

The position of the *adhipati* vis-a-vis gender stratification was, likewise, not clearly defined. A number of *adhipatnīs* are referred

[8] The fight was also given a cosmic dimension, being equated with the conflict between the *devas* and the *asuras*. At another level, it was equated with the fight between the *yajamāna* and his *bhrātṛvya*.

[9] Similarly, the conceptualization of Agni as *gṛhapati* (e.g. RV 7.15.2), literally the lord or master of the *gṛha* was not directly related to *ādhipatya*.

to on the divine plane. These include Aditi, Vāc, the Day and Night, who were conceived of as exercising power in their own rights, and not on account of their association with a male *adhipati*. Moreover, the typical divine *adhipati*, Agni, was not conceived of as participating in gender-related conflicts. However, the utilization of variations of the *soma* sacrifice to legitimize *ādhipatya* meant a reiteration of gender-defined norms in the human situation.

In each instance, what emerges then is a certain dichotomy between the mythical and the ritual or human situation. In the former, virtually all the references to divine *adhipatis* indicate that *ādhipatya* was not conceived of in relation to social conflicts. However, in the human situation, the position envisaged for the *adhipatis* was virtually identical with that of the *śreṣṭha*, although less developed. At the same time, other possibilities hinted at in myths were not translated into the ritual or human situation. As we have seen, divine *adhipatis* were invoked for the protection of *varṇa* categories; references to divine *adhipatnīs* point to the absence of gender stratification in determining access to the position. That these possibilities were not extended to the human context indicates a fundamental transformation in the social role envisaged for the *adhipati*. As we shall see (Chapter 5), similar changes are discernible in the context of *rājya* as well.

The changing social role of the *adhipati* meant that mechanisms to fulfil his earlier functions were no longer adequate. At the same time, evolving and maintaining new mechanisms may have proved difficult to justify in terms of the earlier established definitions of *ādhipatya*. It is this which probably explains the paucity of references to such mechanisms on both the divine and the human planes. What is more, even the limited possibilities envisaged in myths were not developed in the ritual or human context. For instance, the means of acquiring access to resources such as the *bhāga* or share, referred to in myths, are not reiterated in the human situation. In one instance (PVB 6.7.3), there is mention of approaching the divine *adhipatis*, Sūrya, Vāyu and Agni, with a *bhāga* during the *soma* sacrifice. Elsewhere (SB 8.4.2.3–12), *bhāga* and *ādhipatya* were ascribed to pairs of deities, who were jointly expected to protect the social and material order. In both these contexts, *bhāga* was

used in the sense of a sacrificial offering, the exact constituents of which are not specified.[10]

It is likely that claims to *bhāga*, justified on the basis of universal protection, were difficult to uphold for the human *adhipati* whose role was increasingly envisaged in terms of social differentiation. The lack of resources almost inevitably resulted in relatively undeveloped coercive mechanisms.

There are some indications that the *adhipati* was able to coerce opponents into submission. In one instance, Agni, described as the *adhipati* of the heavenly world (AB 3.14.4), refused to let the Vasus, Rudras, Ādityas and Viśvedevas enter his realm until they praised him. Ultimately they gave in, praised the *adhipati* and gained access to his realm. The absence of similar references in the human situation suggests that while coercion was envisaged as a possibility, it was more difficult to implement in practice.

It is significant that the *adhipati* had little or no direct access to or control over ritual situations. While Agni was naturally connected to the ritual, as the very personification of the sacrificial fire, this was not in his capacity as *adhipati* but was ascribed to his role as messenger between gods and men (RV 4.1.8, SB 1.4.1.34), which extended to attempts to identify him with the more important categories of priests (RV 2.1.2, 5.11.2). Hence, the lack of references to human *adhipatis* as controllers, protectors, or even initiators of sacred activities does not seem to be accidental, but would suggest that claims to defining or upholding the realm of the sacred were not intrinsic to *ādhipatya*.

To an extent, this is corroborated by the sacrifices which legitimized *ādhipatya*, which were not independent rituals, but were basically adaptations of the more complex versions of the *soma* sacrifice. These included the *pṛṣṭha ṣaḍaha* (PVB 13.9.23), *dvādaśāha* (ibid.: 11.10.21, BSS 18.19) and *ṛṣabha ekāha* (PVB 19.12.3). Besides, *ādhipatya* could be attained, as one amongst

[10] The association of *bhāga* with individual deities would at the same time indicate a certain shift in its significance, from a share available to all members of the community to a more exclusive definition where a share was offered to certain selected members to the exclusion of others.*

many possible goals, through the performance of sacrifices such as the *vācastoma* (SSS 15.11.1), *sarvamedha* (SB 13.7.1.1, SSS 16.15.1), *rājasūya* (BSS 10.56, SSS 15.12.1), *vājapeya* (ASS 9.9.1), *bṛhaspatisava* (ASS 9.5.3) and the *duraśa* (BSS 18.40).[11] While the performance of such relatively complex rituals provided an occasion for communicating information regarding the power and status of the *yajamāna*, the *adhipati* himself would have been increasingly dependent on the priesthood for access to the sacred.

Of equal significance is the absence of myths explaining the emergence or existence of *ādhipatya*. While this may have been due to the relative unimportance of *ādhipatya* from the point of view of the authors of the brahmanical tradition, it may also indicate a certain discord between the earlier and later definitions of *ādhipatya* referred to above. In such a situation, the divine *adhipati*/*adhipatnīs* were probably no longer regarded as useful reference points for their human counterparts.

In spite of the conflicts and tensions evident in the definition of *ādhipatya*, this was encompassed within *rājya* through rituals such as the *rājasūya* and *vājapeya*. This was probably because *ādhipatya* meant different things to different people. As such, various social categories could identify themselves with a man who claimed to be an *adhipati* amongst other things. At the same time, *ādhipatya* closely approximated *śraiṣṭhya*. As a result, certain definitional possibilities were eschewed, whereas others were modified. The understanding of *ādhipatya* which was ultimately considered acceptable and reinforced through ritual reiteration was that which related the institution to a stratified socio-political order.

V

The insistence on institutionalizing social stratification was not, however, the only tendency at work. In fact, occasionally, almost conflicting possibilities were assimilated within the definition of

[11] Other 'means' of acquiring *ādhipatya* included the knowledge that the thirty-three versed *stoma* was the *adhipati* amongst *stomas*, as was man amongst animals (PVB 6.2.7).

rājya. One such possibility, which had little or no connection with the hierarchical social order, was *vairājya*. Interpretations of the term focus on its associations with universality and creativity, including generative activities.[12] As noted earlier, the term was also the name of a metre which was frequently employed in the ritual context, the attributes ascribed to the personage and the metre often revealing broad similarities. At the same time, the equation established between *vairājya* and a particular metre was a device for ritually, and hence legitimately, appropriating the characteristics of the position in question.

A distinguishing feature of *vairājya* was that it was never defined in terms of categories or groups over which or in relation to which it was exercised. While this lent it a certain universality, as in the case of the Prajāpati form of *śraiṣṭhya*, it also meant that the *virāj* was not conceived of as distinct from those or that over which he or she exercised control. In fact, the notion of control is particularly inadequate for an analysis of *vairājya*, which was conceived of as an all-pervasive, beneficial power which did not imply relationships of domination and subordination.

The role envisaged for the *virāj* (feminine) in creation explores the possibility of alternative relationships. In the Puruṣasūkta (RV 10.90.5), while Virāj was not viewed as the sole creator, she was conceived of as being produced by *puruṣa* or the primeval being (masculine) and in turn producing him. Besides associating heterosexual intercourse with creation, what is unique to this mythic episode is that it conceives of creator and created as mutually, in

[12] For instance, Gonda (1969: 118) suggests that the term indicates 'a power of very high rank representing universal expansiveness, which involves: being powerful and creative, producing food and refreshment'. Elsewhere (1986: 88) he suggests that 'virāj, she "whose eminent universal sovereignty has a wide scope in every direction" is also the hypostatization of the universe as a whole'. Other definitions include 'ruling far and wide, sovereign, excellent, splendid, a ruler, chief, king or queen' (SED: s.v.). On the other hand, Basu (1925: 58) argues that *virāj* 'seems to signify a title of royalty, but its metaphorical use throughout the *Ṛg Veda* does not allow us to derive from it much useful knowledge about the king'. In later literature such as the Kautiliyan *Arthaśāstra*, the term occasionally means the absence of kingly office (R.S. Sharma 1991: 51).

fact identically, supportive of one another, so much so that their very roles were regarded as interchangeable.[13] This possibility, marginalized within the brahmanical tradition, presents an obvious contrast with the Prajāpati-centred cosmogonies discussed earlier.

As this cosmogonic association would suggest, the human *virāj* was not conceived of as controlling material resources or even aspiring to such control. In fact, the *virāj* metre was frequently identified with economic resources. For instance, it was equated with *anna* (SB 12.2.4.5, AA 1.4.1.7) and with what were probably the ten most important products (PVB 16.1.10)—the cow, horse, mule, ass, goat, sheep, rice, barley, sesamum and beans. This is broadly similar to the case of Prajāpati and contrasts with the notion of possessing or controlling resources evident in the definition of *śraiṣṭhya* typified by Indra, and in that of *ādhipatya*. What is more specific to *virāj* is the association with food or *anna*, an important element of the networks of exchange which were often used to bind together those who aspired to dominance with their subordinates.

The identity of the *virāj* with material resources was manipulated in the ritual context for the sacrificer who wished to acquire the ability to eat food (e.g. PVB 4.8.4, SSS 14.25.1, ApSS 22.10.21) with the metre conceptualized (e.g. AB 1.1.6) as enabling a man to become *annāda* (an eater of food), *annapati* (a master of food), to eat along with his *prajā* and to attain *annādya*. Besides, the use of the *vairāja sāman* was regarded as a means of obtaining *prajā* and *paśu* (CU 2.16.2) and all desires (SB 1.5.2.20).

However, in contrast to the *śreṣṭha* and the *adhipati*, the *virāj*, while symbolizing prosperity, was not differentiated from it. Hence, invoking the *virāj* was viewed as a mechanism for appropriating the very prosperity and resources inherent in it. The implications of this were probably two-fold—on the one hand, the human *virāj* may have been associated with a more equitable distribution of produce, if not productive resources, in contrast to the *śreṣṭha* or

[13] A similar possibility is envisaged in the characterization of Aditi (RV 1.89.10), occasionally identified with the *virāj*, as heaven, the intermediate region, mother, father, son, the Viśvedevas, *pañcajanas*, and all that is born and is to be born. In this conceptualization, the creator is regarded as indistinguishable from her creations. She 'is' these.

the *adhipati*, this providing the analogical basis for the use of the *virāj* metre in the ritual context. On the other hand, the very use of the metre in the sacrifice, which was increasingly becoming converted into an occasion for legitimizing socio-economic differentiation, meant that the attributes of *vairājya* were subject to manipulation in favour of the newly emerging order. In other words, while the *virāj* himself/herself was associated with distribution rather than control over produce, the symbolic appropriation of this relationship in the ritual context would have distorted it, with those who aspired to the socio-political benefits of *annādya*, referred to earlier, skewing the distribution (both in material and in social terms) in their favour.[14] This process is often explicitly recognized within the brahmanical tradition. In one instance (SB 12.6.1.40), the *virāj* was equated with the earth, it being stated that whoever has the most of it becomes a *śreṣṭha*. Thus, the relationship between *vairājya* and *śraiṣṭhya* was conceived of in exploitative and appropriative terms.

The absence of a definite role for the *virāj* vis-à-vis the social issues identified earlier is also significant. Unlike the other metres such as the *gāyatrī*, *triṣṭubh* or *jagatī*, which were frequently equated with the *brahma*, *kṣatra* and *viś* respectively and manipulated in the ritual context to ensure the 'proper' *varṇa* configurations, the *virāj* metre was not used to express such social concerns. This was probably owing to the universality characteristic of *vairājya*, which could not be easily constricted into a particular framework.[15]

This is corroborated when one turns to the other major area of socio-political conflict, that amongst kinsmen. There are only a few references to the *virāj* being *sapatnahā* (a destroyer of rival kinsmen, BSS 6.28, ApSS 11.12.2). This is, once again, significant, given the widespread use of the metre in the ritual.

Given the importance assigned to defining gender stratification in the context of *śraiṣṭhya*, and to a lesser extent *ādhipatya*, the

[14] The *virāj* did not directly depend on the performance of sacrifices to legitimize his/her status. As such, ritual exchanges such as *dakṣiṇā*, which, we have argued, intensified socio-economic differences, would have been irrelevant in the context of *vairājya*.

[15] There are, further, no references to the *varṇa* of the human *virāj*.

frequent conceptualization of the *virāj* in feminine terms on both the divine and the human plane presents a striking contrast. Amongst goddesses, Aditi, typifying the earth (SB 2.2.1.20), Vāc (ibid.: 3.5.1.34) and Śrī (ibid.: 11.4.3.18) were symbolized by the *virāj* metre. As we have seen, these goddesses were conceived of as attempting to counter the process of gender stratification in particular and socio-political differentiation in general, with very limited success. To an extent, this reflects the fate of *vairājya* as a possibility of ordering socio-political ties, a possibility which was appropriated but at the same time marginalized within the brahmanical tradition. This shift is symbolized in the characterization of the *virāj* as the wife of Indra (BAU 4.2.3), a relationship which would have emphasized the dependence and instrumentality of the former vis-a-vis the latter.

References to *vairājya* as a possibility accessible to women are relatively few. Nevertheless, these are significant, given the complete absence of such speculation as far as other positions of status are concerned. Occasionally (e.g. BSS 1.12) a prayer was recommended during the fortnightly new and full moon sacrifice to ensure that the son of the *yajamāna* would become a destroyer of enemies, while his daughter would become a *virāj*.[16] In this situation, the woman herself may have had little or no say in the matter. Besides, the context of *vairājya* was clearly envisaged as domestic—the universal aspect of *vairājya* associated with Aditi, for instance, would be dismissed with lip service in such a situation. The restricted context also probably resulted, at another level, in reinforcing the instrumental aspects of *vairājya*, an instrumentality which was increasingly being brought under patriarchal control.

The mechanisms we have traced in connection with the exercise of *śraiṣṭhya*, and, to a lesser extent, *ādhipatya*, were probably irrelevant in the context of *vairājya*, where enforcing relations of dominance and subordination was not conceived of as centrally or even marginally important. The alternative mechanisms by which beneficial forces were thought to be disseminated rather than

[16] This reminds one of Śacī Paulomī's claim (RV 10.159.3) that her daughter was a *virāj*.

individualistically accumulated can only be tentatively reconstructed.

One such mechanism was probably the sacrifice, in which the use of the *virāj* metre was considered indispensable (PVB 6.8.1). The metre was equated with the sacrifice (SB 2.3.1.18) and was regarded as a means of conveying the ritual to the gods and bringing it back to men (ibid.: 3.3.2.16). This would suggest that *vairājya* was conceived of in terms of a beneficent and communicative form of sacrality. More specifically, the metre was associated with the *soma* sacrifice, which was thought of as established on the *virāj* (AB 3.15.6, ApSS 6.13.9). Thus the metre was virtually identified with the ritual and its success. This association was in many ways reminiscent of that of Prajāpati.

What is also significant is that virtually no sacrifice was recommended for the exclusive attainment of *vairājya*.[17] In other words, while the *virāj* was expected to ensure general well-being through close association or even identification with the sacrifice, she/he did not directly depend on the ritual as a means of legitimizing his/her position. This may have been due to the fact that *vairājya*, with relatively non-hierarchical connotations, did not require ritual legitimization, possibly enjoying a certain amount of popular acceptance. It is also likely that, because of these connotations, *vairājya* was not regarded as particularly convenient from the point of view of the brahmanical tradition, which, more often than not, reiterated and reinforced various socio-political hierarchies. Hence, it is not surprising that the possibilities inherent in *vairājya* were not elaborated or legitimized through rituals or myths.

Nevertheless, *vairājya*, like *ādhipatya*, was incorporated within the composite definition of *rājya* (e.g. AB 8.39.5). This ensured a wider acceptance for *rājya*, which was associated, hypothetically at least, with notions of general well-being. It was this element of universal benevolence which was the greatest strength of *vairājya*

[17] The closest approximation is the *virāṭ-svārājya* by means of which Mitra was supposed to have attained *vairājya*, while Varuṇa attained *svārājya* (SSS 14.30.1).

and its incorporation within *rājya*, even as an (possibly unrealizable) ideal, would have conferred greater legitimacy on the latter.

Yet, there was a fundamental conflict between the notion of *rājya*, especially as it developed over time, and that of *vairājya*. This was inevitable, given the growing association of the *rājā* with a hierarchical social order. As opposed to this, *vairājya* typified the aspirations of a less stratified society. Ultimately the breach between the two positions widened irrevocably. This is reflected in the sharply divergent etymological derivations of *virāj*—as one who is an excellent ruler (*viśeṣeṇa rājate iti virāj*) and as one from whom the *rājya* has departed (*vigatam rājyam yasmāt saḥ virāj*). Thus, *vairājya*, instead of representing the very best elements of *rājya*, came to be associated with what was perceived as a dangerous condition of 'kinglessness'.

VI

If the possibilities inherent in *vairājya* were marginalized in the process of its amalgamation into the definition of *rājya*, these were, at another level, countered through the development of the notion of *svārājya*. As the very use of the prefix *sva* indicates, the concept of *svārājya* emphasized the distinct position of the ruler vis-à-vis those over whom he exercised control. This is reflected in the meanings assigned to the term, which include connotations of independent rule, uncontrolled dominance and sovereignty (SED: s.v.), 'supremacy' (Caland 1931:517) and 'self-ruler or king' (VI: s.v.).

While *svārājya* was an attribute of a number of deities, it was not typical or specific to any one of them. Moreover, on the human plane, even incidental references to the characteristics of *svarājs* are sparse. In this situation, rituals prescribed for the attainment of *svārājya* constitute our major source of information.

On the divine plane, *svarājs* were conceived of as exercising control over categories from which they were, to some extent at least, differentiated. For instance, the Maruts (RV 5.58.1) were referred to as *amṛtasya svarājaḥ* (i.e. the lords of immortality). Elsewhere (SSS 15.11.1), Vāc was conceived of as acquiring

svārājya, amongst other things, over all creatures (*sarveṣām bhūtānām . . . svārājyam*), while Varuṇa, himself a typical *rājā*, was thought to assert *svārājya* over all *rājās*. In the last two instances, control was explicitly envisaged over the totality of the category in question. This was reiterated in the conceptualization of the *svārājya* of Indra (RV 8.93.11), which could not be challenged by either the gods or men, implying that it was exercised over them.

On the human plane, there is some indication that *svārājya* was conceived of as control or dominance of the category to which the *svarāj* belonged; implicit in this statement (PVB 10.3.8) that awareness of the *bṛhatī* metre being a *svarāj* amongst metres enabled the sacrificer to attain *svārājya*. However, the *svarāj* was not explicitly associated with *samānas*, *sva* or *manuṣyas*. *Svārājya* in the human context was also associated with the control of specific directions, such as the west (AB 8.38.3) and the north (SSS 17.16.2) but was not extended to imply territorial control.

While the divine *svarājs* were not explicitly associated with cosmogonic speculation, they were considered responsible for ensuring material well-being, a prayer being offered to them in the *soma* sacrifice (LSS 3.5.15) in order to obtain rain, food, wealth and prosperity. A similar connection was reiterated in the *gosava*, which legitimized *svārājya* (PVB 19.13.1) and was regarded as a means of ensuring general fertility.

Svārājya was associated with the control of at least some productive resources. This is evident from the statement (PVB 24.6.3) that the man who possesses numerous cattle acquires *svārājya*. Besides, the *gosava* was also recommended for the man desirous of acquiring cattle and progeny (ASS 9.8.12, SSS 14.15.1).

A distinctive feature of *svārājya* was the enormous *dakṣiṇā* prescribed for the rituals which legitimized it. The recommended *dakṣiṇā* for the *gosava*, for instance, ranged from ten thousand (ASS 9.8.14) to sixty-three thousand (SSS 14.15.6) or a myriad (*ayūta dakṣiṇā*, BSS 18.7) (presumably) cattle. Another sacrifice legitimizing *svārājya*, the *pauṇḍarīka ekādaśāha* (a variation on the eleven-day *soma* sacrifice, PVB 22.18.2), is once again described as an *ayūta dakṣiṇā* sacrifice (BSS 16.32), with the gift of a thousand horses being explicitly specified (ibid.). – to attain svārājya one had to be extremely wealthy –

While both *svārājya* and *vairājya* were linked to general well-being, they were thus diametrically opposed to one another in terms of the control of material resources. The contrast is particularly stark if one focuses on the use envisaged for such resources—the distribution of resources by the *svarāj* was clearly directional and socially differentiated, and was meant to strengthen his claims to status. The *virāj*, on the other hand, was associated with an undifferentiated distribution network, which was, however, subject to manipulation.

The social role envisaged for the *svarāj*, likewise, reveals some similarities as well as certain fundamental differences with that of the *virāj*. Like *vairājya*, *svārājya* was not directly related, on either the divine or the human plane, to the concerns of the *varṇa* hierarchy. Nevertheless, the use of variations of the *soma* sacrifice to legitimize *svārājya* meant that at least some statements about it would have been woven into the definition of *svārājya*.

A similar tendency is apparent in connection with the relationship amongst kinsmen. This is evident from the myth of Indra's acquisition of *svārājya* (RV 1.80.1, 2) after driving away the serpent Ahi and striking down Vṛtra. This connection was reiterated through the use of variations in the *soma* sacrifice to legitimize *svārājya*. Such rituals would have also emphasized the importance of patrilineal connections.

The contrast between *vairājya* and *svārājya* is also evident with reference to gender stratification. While the former was characterized by feminine elements, the latter was linked to establishing a gender hierarchy inherent in legitimization through variations in the *soma* sacrifice. Besides, the *gosava* involved the assertion of control over three women—the *yajamāna's* mother, his sister and a woman belonging to the same *gotra*, the *yajamāna* being expected to mate with them in order to ensure fertility (ApSS 22.13.2). Thus, if the *soma* sacrifice entailed the particular subjugation of the wife, the *gosava* extended such possibilities to women who could not, by definition, be encompassed within the category of wifehood.

As in the case of *ādhipatya* and *vairājya*, the mechanisms whereby *svārājya* was exercised are not mentioned. It is possible, however, that the very sacrifices which provided for the legitimiza-

tion of the position, functioned at the same time as a mechanism for exercising *svārājya.*[18]

The *gosava*, prescribed for the legitimization of *svārājya*, was characterized by an *abhiṣeka* or anointing of the *yajamāna* with fresh milk, considered symbolic of *svārājya* (PVB 19.13.7). The *abhiṣeka* was closely associated with the conferring of *rājya* as well. The use of an identical, if simpler procedure in the context of *svārājya* would have drawn attention to the similarities envisaged between the two.

As in the case of *ādhipatya*, *svārājya* was recognized amongst the many goals which could be attained through the *vācastoma* (SSS 15.11.1), *rājasūya* (ibid.:15.12.1), *virāṭ-svārājya* (ibid.:14.30.1) and the *sarvamedha* (SB 13.7.1.1, SSS 16.15.1). These would represent attempts to amalgamate the ideal of *svārājya* with those of *rājya*, *ādhipatya* and *śraiṣṭhya.*

In one instance (PVB 25.7.3), a *sattra* known as the *ṣaṭtriṃśat samvatsara*, literally a sacrifice lasting thirty-six years, was recommended for the attainment of *svārājya.* It is unlikely that it had any practical significance, and it was in all probability a theoretical, priestly construct. Nevertheless, that *svārājya* was considered important enough to figure in such abstract speculation is significant and points to the importance of the concept within the dominant brahmanical tradition.[19]

Svārājya was thus characterized by the development of possibilities which were alternatives to, and to an extent, opposed to those inherent in *vairājya.* At the same time, the *svarāj* shared, or gradually acquired, certain features in common with the *śreṣṭha* and the *adhipati*, symbolized in the use of variations in the *soma* sacrifice for legitimization. If one visualizes a situation where *śraiṣṭhya*, *ādhipatya*, *vairājya* and *svārājya* typified the attributes expected of the leaders or chiefs of distinct communities or groups in contact with one another, it is easy to understand how the attributes of

[18] Like the divine *adhipatis*, divine *svarājs* were not conceived of as identical with or as protectors of the cult. This contrasts with the position of the *virāj* and the *śreṣṭha.*

[19] However, there are no detailed myths to explain or justify the origin or existence of the institution.

such high-ranking men could be coalesced over a period of time. This was especially likely if the groups in question were stratified, even if specific elements of stratification varied. Although the position of the *rājā* may have initially been closer to that of the *virāj*, the definition of *rājya* as it evolved over time approximated more closely to that of the *svarāj*. As a result, the possibility of organizing socio-economic relations on an equitable basis gave way to more partisan tendencies, delineated in the context of *śraiṣṭhya*, and reiterated, with modifications, in the context of *ādhipatya* and *svārājya*. This did not, however, involve a simple reiteration of similar concerns through the device of the *soma* sacrifice or its variations. The resolutions evolved were considerably more complex. Moreover, these were not static, but evidently changed in response to a changing situation. It is on the dynamics of *rājya* that we will next focus our attention.

- attributes, relations, deeds & gods as those
in men: analogous to Greek system
- implications are that monarchs gradually
saw themselves as earthly "gods" as their power
and rights mirrored or exceeded the
gods: 1) control of wealth, power, miracles,
- adhipati had little control over ritual - thus
complete dependence on priests - adhipati
seen as related to a dialectic socio-political
order (sreshtha = ritual, pure - excellence & power
through Truth)
- the ancient texts (all authored by Brahmans)
attempt to construct a legitimacy for
the caste system and to have all the socio-
political things which plays Brahmins at the
apex.
- in Vedic texts, the word (name) carried the
same sacral quality as the thing (god) named -

Chapter Four

The Rājā (I): Realm and Resources

Wealth are *rāṣṭras.*

Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.

I

The emergence of the *rājā* as virtually the sole legitimate claimant of political power and authority was a gradual and complex process. Both these elements are, to an extent, reflected in the sources available for an analysis of the institution.

According to modern scholars (e.g. IED: s.v.), the noun *rājan* was derived from the Indo-European root *rēg*, related to the Latin verbal form *regere*, meaning to direct, guide or rule, reflected in the parallel Sanskrit root *rj*, with its implication of proceeding in a straight line. While these possibilities were not explicitly abandoned in later definitions, the standard derivation in later Sanskrit literature was based on the verbal root *rāj*, meaning to shine or *rañj*, meaning to redden or charm. These etymologies, emphasizing the ability to direct or guide, or alternatively to charm or attract, are basically functional.[1] While this may have implied a certain superiority of the *rājā* vis-a-vis those who were directed, led or attracted, notions of supremacy were not intrinsic to the definition of *rājya*. In this sense, *rājya* presents a contrast to both *śraiṣṭhya* and *ādhipatya*. Attempts to coalesce *rājya* with the latter two possibilities resulted in a fundamental transformation of the former institution.

This transformation and the concomitant socio-political tensions are dealt with fairly explicitly in the mythical sphere, both through the attribution of *rājya* to different deities and through the

[1] I am not concerned here with the problem of the grammatical accuracy of such etymologies. What is important is that these derivations were regarded as acceptable by contemporaries, and, as such, reflect a certain understanding of the institution.

exploration of the relationship between the typical divine *rājās* and other gods. Initially, in the early Vedic tradition and, to a lesser extent, the later Vedic tradition, the two deities most commonly referred to as *rājās* were Varuṇa (RV 4.1.2, PVB 24.18.2, AB 1.4.7, SB 2.6.4.3, BSS 2.16, ASS 3.6.24, SSS 5.8.4, ApSS 10.11.1, LSS 3.1.21, PGS 1.5.11, SGS 1.28.15)[2] and Soma (RV 9.97.24, PVB 11.3.9, AB 1.4.9, BSS 7.1, ASS 4.2.18, SSS 7.15.1, LSS 1.10.24, BAU 6.2.9, AGS 1.17.10, PGS 2.6.17, SGS 1.27.7, ADS 1.6.18.23, VDS 1.45).[3] Soma was, in fact, so closely associated with *rājya* that the term *rājā* was often used as a synonym for the deity, especially in the sacrificial context (e.g. SSS 7.15.1).[4]

The association of two distinct deities with a single institution suggests a certain parallel with *śraiṣṭhya*. To an extent, this is supported by the relative importance of the two gods. Varuṇa evidently crossed the zenith of his importance in the early Vedic tradition (Griswold 1971: 87, Choudhuri 1981: 33). Besides, his conceptualization underwent changes: 'After having been one of the most completely personalized gods of the RV he is gradually depersonalized and de-ethicized' (Griswold 1971: 86).

If the number of hymns addressed to him is any indication, Soma was evidently more popular than Varuṇa in the early Vedic tradition, being preceded only by Indra and Agni.[5] However, Soma was rarely conceived of in anthropomorphic terms, being almost completely identified with the juice-producing plant. As a result, 'the divine personality of Soma . . . is, even for Vedic imagery, of an extremely vague and shadowy character' (Eggeling 1963b: xii).

[2] Varuṇa was occasionally referred to as an *adhipati* (SB 8.4.3.13, SSS 6.3.3, PGS 1.5.10), *samrāj* (RV 2.28.6) and *svarāj* (ibid.: 2.28.1). However, none of these terms was central to his characterization.

[3] Like Varuṇa, Soma was occasionally referred to as an *adhipati* (SB 8.4.3.17, PGS 1.5.10) and *svarāj* (BSS 15.23, ApSS 20.15.5).

[4] Other deities referred to as *rājā* include Yama (SB 2.3.2.1, BSS 28.1, SSS 4.21.9, ApSS 16.6.4), Āditya (RV 1.20.5), Bṛhaspati (RV 2.30.9), Mitra (ibid.: 1.137.1), Agni (ibid.: 3.1.18, SB 2.6.4.2), the Ādityas (RV 2.27.1) and the Maruts (ibid.: 1.85.8). For references to Indra as *rājā*, see below.

[5] Almost all the hymns addressed to Soma (114 out of 122) were compiled together in the ninth *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛg Veda* (Kapadia 1959: 2), the first eight books containing only three hymns exclusively addressed to him.

Despite these divergences, both Varuṇa and Soma were important deities in the early Vedic tradition (Griswold 1971: 87) and were possibly of Indo-Iranian, if not Indo-European, origin (Deshmukh 1933: 178, 214). More important, they shared certain common characteristics, being associated with *ṛta*, symbolic of the natural, moral and cosmic order, and *satya* or truth (Deshmukh 1933: 215, Kapadia 1959: 27). Even in the later tradition, the deities were assimilated with one another in the course of the *soma* sacrifice (SB 3.3.4.25, 29). Hence, although Varuṇa and Soma were not identical, they were not as dissimilar as Indra and Prajāpati. Thus, the ascription of *rājya* to the former pair on the divine plane permitted the consolidation of certain values, but did not contain the scope for widening the definition of *rājya* which was possible in connection with *śraiṣṭhya*.

Nevertheless, the scope of *rājya* was widened. On the mythical plane, this is reflected in what may be described as the 'Indraization' of the institution. While Indra is referred to as a *rājā* almost throughout the brahmanical tradition (e.g. RV 4.19.10, SB 2.6.4.4, SSS 4.21.11), he was not, initially at least, regarded as the typical divine *rājā* (Kuiper 1979: 25). However, in the post-Vedic popular version of the brahmanical tradition, typified by the epics and the Purāṇas, Indra emerges as the sole divine *rājā* (Subrahmania Iyer 1930: 39).

That the transition was not entirely smooth is evident from the tension characteristic of the Varuṇa-Indra relationship, most explicit in the dialogue attributed to them (RV 4.42) in which each deity supposedly extolled his own virtue.[6] Somewhat less explicit is the hostility between the two as depicted in the legend of Śunaḥśepa (e.g. SSS 15.19.1), where Indra was conceived of as preventing, or at least postponing, the sacrifice of Rohita, Varuṇa's chosen victim (Rau 1973: 201).

[6] While Varuṇa was repeatedly referred to (or was conceived of as referring to himself) as a *rājā* in this context, Indra was associated with exploits such as the killing of Vṛtra, but not with claims to *rājya*. Nevertheless, Indra's importance was systematically asserted. Kuiper (1979: 23) suggests: 'What is at stake is the justness not of Varuṇa's reference to his old rights but of Indra's claims, which he proclaims to Varuṇa and which the poet confirms.'

In the ultimate analysis, it was Indra who was conceived of as victorious, evident from references to Varuṇa and Sūrya following Indra's *vrata* or law (RV 1.101.3) and to the recommended use of *mantras* referring to Indra as *samrāj* and Varuṇa as *rājā* (BSS 17.5, SSS 9.6.21, ApSS 14.3.5, LSS 3.1.2).[7] However, the notions of *rājya* implicit in the conceptualization of Varuṇa and Soma were not completely negated. Hence, an analysis of *rājya* necessitates focusing on the attributes of all three deities and examining how these were ordered, fused or modified to arrive at a new definition of rulership.

The tension inherent in reconciling different, and often conflicting, possibilities was reflected in rituals such as the *rājasūya* as well. The discovery of the sacrifice, often referred to as the *Varuṇasava* (PVB 19.13.1, SB 5.3.4.12) and its initial performance (e.g. SSS 15.12.1) was attributed to Varuṇa, who was reputed to have imparted its knowledge to Hariścandra (AB 7.33.3). However, in the actual performance of the ritual, attempts were constantly made to equate the *yajamāna* or the *rājā* with Indra, as, for instance, in the *ratnīnāmhavīṃśi* (e.g. BSS 12.5).[8]

While the Indraization of *rājya* was worked out more or less systematically in rituals which legitimized *rājya* such as the *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha* and *vājapeya* they were simultaneously manipulated to incorporate the attributes associated with Prajāpati.[9] This was developed to connect the *rājā* with a specific form of cosmogonic speculation, which, as noted earlier, justified access to and control over productive resources and produce.

Certain features which characterized these rituals are significant—none of them is referred to in the early Vedic tradition.[10]

[7] The term *samrāj* probably indicated the apogee of *rājya* rather than emperor. *Samyak rājate iti samrāṭ.*

[8] At another level, the bow given to the *rājā* was compared to Indra's *vajra* or thunderbolt (BSS 12.9).

[9] For instance, the seventeen kinds of waters used for the *abhiṣeka* during the *rājasūya* symbolized Prajāpati, who was also associated with that number. The reiteration of the number during the *vājapeya* had a similar significance (Gonda 1969: 84), while in the *aśvamedha*, the very horse was equated with Prajāpati (SB 13.1.1.1).

[10] The reference to the *aśvamedha* in the first *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛg Veda* is both

Thus, these were, in a sense, new rituals developed to cope with a new situation. Each of these rituals was complex and composite, pointing to an attempt to weave together a range of customary practices. For instance, the *rājasūya* included rites underscoring and accomplishing the change of status of the *rājā* such as the *abhiṣeka* (SB 5.3.4.3) and the mounting of the throne (ibid.: 5.4.4.1) as well as rites to ensure the support of important personnel, both human and divine, through the *ratnīnāmhavīṃśi* (ibid.: 5.3.1.1) and the *devasūhavīṁśī* (ibid.: 5.3.3.2–12) respectively. It also incorporated rituals suggestive of the physical and mental transformation of the sacrificer such as the *dīkṣā* or initiation (ibid.: 5.3.5.19) and the final ceremonial cutting of his hair (ibid.: 5.5.3.2). Besides, the mock cattle raid (ibid.: 5.4.3.1) and the game of dice (ibid.: 5.4.4.6), symbolic of an assertion of economic control, were also assimilated, as were more general rites meant to ensure well-being and prosperity such as the *cāturmāsyas* (ibid.: 5.2.3.10) or four-monthly sacrifices associated with the agricultural cycle, and a specific variant of the *soma* sacrifice known as the *daśapeya* (ibid.: 5.4.5.4). It was in fact 'an encyclopaedic conglomerate of royal rites' (Heesterman 1957: 225), 'one of these *śrauta* sacrifices in which royal rites and cults, probably of diverse origin, were preserved' (ibid.: 4). Both the provision for such varied, composite rituals, and their ultimate supersession by alternative means of legitimizing and enforcing claims to *rājya* provide us with a wealth of information on the institution.

As important is the existence of references to specific human *rājās*. These include lists of *rājās* who performed sacrifices such as the *rājasūya* (AB 7.35.8), *aśvamedha* (SB 13.5.4.1–22, SSS 16.8.27) and *aindramahābhiṣeka* (AB 8.39.7–9).[11] Such lists were evidently deliberately produced and preserved within the brahmanical tradition. Thus *rājās* were accorded a recognition denied to others,

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late and ambiguous. The concept of an *abhiṣeka*, central to the acquisition of *rājya*, is also unknown in the text.

[11] Besides, Kuru-Pañcāla *rājās* were regarded as typical performers of the *rājasūya* (SB 5.5.2.5). The former were ideal performers of the *vājapeya* as well (SSS 15.3.17).

especially if they were able to establish and legitimize their claims to status through the performance of complex rituals.

Apart from stereotyped lists, specific *rājās* are referred to in legends incorporated within the tradition to underscore important issues and their resolutions. Such legends indicate that some of the actions of *rājās* were fairly well-known and were used as points of reference. Besides, there are incidental allusions in similies and analogies to the conduct of *rājās* in general. In all likelihood, these reflect common perceptions of the *rājā* and his functions. Thus, while we are not in a position to reconstruct the history of any individual *rājā*, the development of the institution of *rājya* is more amenable to analysis.

II

The changes implicit in the range of sources available for an analysis of *rājya* are evident when one examines specific facets of the institution, such as the units or categories in terms of which it was defined. Here, there is a shift from definitions in terms of a relatively undifferentiated category, implying the unity and near identity between the *rājā* and those who depended on him, to definitions which envisaged the existence of a complex, differentiated, socio-political order.

The typical divine *rājās* were envisaged as exercising control over groups to which they intrinsically belonged, with Varuṇa being conceived of as the *rājā* of the *devas* (RV 4.42.1, SB 12.8.3.10) and of the Ādityas (SSS 4.21.10). His association with the latter was particularly close, as they were regarded as his brothers, born from their common mother Aditi.[12] Soma, likewise, was an *oṣadhi* or plant, who was the *rājā* of other plants (PVB 11.3.9).

The evidence relating to some of the other, less typical, divine *rājās* also conforms to this pattern. Yama, for instance, was regarded as the *rājā* of the *pitṛs* (SSS 4.21.9). This was in a sense logical, as

[12] Varuṇa was occasionally identified with the *samvatsara* (e.g. SB 4.1.4.10) but this was not a typical attribute of the deity and may have been added on to facilitate an identification between him and Prajāpati.

he was believed to be the first man to die and transcend death, and as such, would have been the first of the deceased patrilineal ancestors.

Similar definitions were reiterated in the human context. For instance, the man who obtained a *rāṣṭra* was regarded as a *vasiṣṭha*[13] amongst *samānas* or equals (BSS 14.17). Elsewhere (ibid.: 18.40) an analogy was drawn between the *rājā* and the *ṛṣabha* or bull amongst animals, once again implying a basic commonality between the *rājā* and those over whom he exercised control.[14]

At another level, specific *rājās* were identified as belonging to named people virtually throughout the brahmanical tradition. These included Ṛṇamcaya, who was described as the *rājā* of the Ruṣamas (RV 5.30.14), Para Āṭnāra, a Kauśalya *rājā* (SB 13.5.4.4), Balhika Prātīpiya, a Kauravya *rājā* (ibid.: 12.9.3.3) and Hariścandra, the Aikṣvāka *rājā* (SSS 15.17.1). As an extension of this, the *rāṣṭra*[15] or the realm of the *rājā* was also defined in terms of the people comprising it, with the Kurus and the Śṛñjayas being referred to as two *rāṣṭras* (SB 2.4.4.5). Such definitions were legitimized through the *rājasūya* (e.g. BSS 12.9) and *aśvamedha* (ApSS 20.4.3), where the sacrificer was proclaimed as the *rājā* of the *viś*.

However, the distance between the *rājā* and the *viś* was steadily increasing on the one hand, and the *viś* itself was tending to become more and more differentiated.[16] As a result, other definitions of *rājya* evolved, envisaging distinctions between the *rājā* and his people, reflected in the conceptualization of deities exercising *rājya* over human beings—Agni, for instance, was regarded as the *rājā* of the *viś* (RV 2.2.8), while Soma figured as the *rājā* of both gods and mortals (ibid.: 9.97.24).[17]

[13] Most excellent, best, richest (SED: s.v.).

[14] A similar understanding is apparent in the description of the nine-versed *stoma* or hymn as the *rājā* amongst *stomas* (PVB 21.5.9).

[15] *Rāṣṭra* was in all likelihood 'used more in the sense of realm, sphere of authority' (Thapar 1984: 34) as opposed to territory.

[16] The first process will be examined in the next chapter. I will focus on the second in Chapter 7.

[17] At a different level, a similar widening of the definition of *rājya* is evident in philosophical speculation, where the *ātman* or the supreme soul was compared

On the human plane, the tendency to assert control over more than one category of people is evident in the *rājasūya* in particular, where alternative formulae were probably devised to cope with a changing situation, with provisions for proclaiming the *yajamāna* as the *rājā* of the Kurus, or the Pañcālas, or the Kuru-Pañcālas, or of the *janatā* (i.e. the people at large, ApSS 18.12.7).[18]

As opposed to definitions in terms of people, the links of *rājya* with delimited territory were rather weak. Occasionally, divine *rājās* were associated with the control of spatial categories, Varuṇa being characterized as the *rājā* of earth and heaven (RV 1.25.20) and Soma as the *rājā* of the entire earth (Deshmukh 1933: 281). However, such attributes were not typical of either deity.

In the human context, an assertion of control over spatial categories is implicit in the *rājasūya*, where the *rājā* was referred to as one who had conquered all directions (ApSS 18.19.5). By its very vagueness, such a definition would have permitted an extension of the sphere of influence of the *rājā*.[19]

The definition of *rājya* on the human plane was thus characterized by a tendency to incorporate more and more people within its scope, as well as to extend the spheres of influence of the *rājā*. Initially, definitions of *rājya* emphasized the connection between the *rājā* and his people rather than between the *rājā* and material resources. However, as the relationship between the *rājā* and his people changed—both in terms of the number of people with whom connections were envisaged and in terms of the social categories involved in such networks—a different approach towards material resources emerged. This shift was at once a response to what may

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to the *bhūtānām rājā* or the lord of creatures (BAU 2.1.15).

[18] The provision for anointing the sacrificer for *rājya* over numerous people (*mahate janānām rājyāya*, SB 5.3.3.12) would also have had similar implications.

[19] The notion of the *janapada* evidently crystallized over a period of time. This is suggested by the equation between the *janapada* and the body (BAU 2.1.18) in an analogy which states that just as a *mahārāja* might keep his *jānapadas* or subjects within his own *janapada*, so does the *puruṣa* or soul within the body keep the senses within it during sleep. Such an equation would have been valid only if the *janapada* had fairly well-defined boundaries.

be characterized as changes in the people or the *viš* and at the same time reinforced the very changes which were taking place in the economy and in society.

III

The shift in the relationship of the *rājā* to economic resources is reflected at a number of levels. To start with cosmogonic speculation, the index to claims to determining and ensuring the pre-conditions of material well-being, we can observe a striking contrast between the typical divine *rājās* and their human counterparts.

Varuṇa's creative activities, which are referred to incidentally in the early Vedic tradition, were, in some ways, reminiscent of Indra's. He was credited with establishing the heaven and earth with Mitra's assistance (RV 5.62.3), besides placing the sun in the sky (ibid.: 5.63.7) and regulating the course of the moon and stars (ibid.: 1.24.10). At another level, he was conceived of as providing human beings with the crucial elements of fire and water (ibid.: 5.85.2, 2.28.4, 5.62.3) and ensuring that the basic productive resources, plants and cows, flourished (ibid.). Besides, he was supposed to have placed *soma* on the rock or mountain (ibid.: 5.85.2), thus implicitly making it accessible to mortals, and was associated, along with Mitra, with the creation of the basic temporal units of the year, month and day, as well as with the creation of the sacrifice and the ritual chants (ibid.: 7.66.11). Thus, Varuṇa's role in creation was thought to ensure the manifestation of the physical, natural and sacral phenomena which were conceived of as providing the tangible basis for human existence, and was comparable with the all-encompassing scope of Prajāpati's cosmogonic activities.

However, the means whereby Varuṇa was conceived as fulfilling his role were distinctive—as 'the possessor or wielder of that incomprehensible creative power or faculty to achieve the marvellous which was known as māyā' (Gonda 1959: 114). The attributes of *māyā* which were focused on in the later brahmanical tradition included the ability to be used for good and evil (Gonda 1965: 167), while still later, it was conceived of as the cause of what was viewed as the illusion of worldly existence.

While the connotations of *māyā* are clearly complex, the shifts in meaning which the term undergoes over time can broadly be summarized as being from an exalted, positive sense, to a more ambiguous meaning, to a negative sense, within at least some of the most important post-Vedic philosophical traditions. Part of the explanation for this semantic shift may lie in the association of Varuṇa with *māyā*, and in the tendency to relegate the values conceptualized in connection with the deity to a subordinate position.[20] As such, references to Varuṇa's cosmogonic activities are virtually absent from the later brahmanical tradition, and, not surprisingly, the human *rājā* was not envisaged as ensuring material well-being through *māyā*, although he was expected to do so through other means.

Soma was, like Varuṇa, associated with the material aspects of creation. In the early Vedic context, Soma was envisaged as masculine, laying the *garbha* or embryo in Aditi, from which offspring were produced for human beings (RV 9.74.5).[21] This implied a recognition of the physical process of heterosexual intercourse as procreative, which, as noted earlier, was marginalized in the later brahmanical tradition.

At the same time, the bringing or procuring of Soma was frequently referred to in both the early and the later Vedic tradition (e.g. RV 4.27.1–5, 3.43.7). The notion of the dependence and passivity of the deity, implicit in this conceptualization, would have made him particularly unfit for the role of supreme creator.

Cosmogonies in the later Vedic tradition located Soma within the sacrificial framework. In one instance (BAU 6.2.9), Soma was thought to be produced from the oblations offered by the gods—Soma, when offered, produced rain, rain produced food, food produced semen and semen men.[22] In other words, Soma was

[20] Further examples of this are noted below and in Chapters 5 and 6.

[21] Soma was occasionally conceived of as causing the sun to shine (RV 6.44.23), generating the two worlds (ibid.: 6.44.24) and supporting the heavens (ibid.: 9.66.17). These achievements may have been attributed to him owing to his close association with Indra and were probably not intrinsic to the deity (Deshmukh 1933: 286).

[22] According to Gonda (1965: 47), Soma's kingship rested on this identification with generative forces.

conceived of as instrumental in the creative process, but was not envisaged as the first cause or as the creator. Besides, while the earlier association with the physical aspects of creation were reiterated, the basic means of creation envisaged were explicitly sacrificial, pushing the notion of procreative intercourse into the background.

It was this notion of the sacrifice as creative which was elaborated in connection with the human *rājā*. This was achieved through the development of equations between Prajāpati and the *yajamāna* in the *rājasūya*, *vājapeya* and *aśvamedha*. The *rājasūya* was regarded as one of the sacrifices used by Prajāpati for his creative activities (SB 5.3.3.15), implying that the *yajamāna*, following in Prajāpati's footsteps, was responsible for creation. The *vājapeya*, apart from being connected with Prajāpati through the constant use of his characteristic number, seventeen, was envisaged as a means of attaining this world as well as others (ibid.: 5.1.5.1, 5.2.1.5). The *aśvamedha* was a means of obtaining the *saṃvatsara* or year (ibid.: 13.1.2.1), the cosmogonic implications of which have been referred to earlier. Besides, the horse was regarded as symbolic of the eye of Prajāpati (PVB 21.4.2) which was restored to the god through sacrifice (ibid., SB 13.4.4.11), this implying the restoration of the pristine cosmic order associated with the deity.

The notion of the restoration or regeneration of the cosmic order and its consequent material and social benefits was worked out through specific components of these rituals. For instance, in the *rājasūya*, the *āgrāyaneṣṭi* or the offering of first fruits was viewed as a means of ensuring that plants were 'healthy and faultless' (Eggeling 1963c: 46, SB 5.2.3.9).[23] As this suggests, particular elements of material well-being were identified as goals of sacrifices, with cattle being supposedly endowed with milk, oxen with strength

[23] According to Heesterman (1957: 29) the *cāturmāsyas* in the *rājasūya* were 'a ritual evocation of the universal process of maturing and birth in the vegetable, animal and human spheres through the year'. Besides, the *keśavapanīya* or the cutting of the hair of the sacrificer probably had a similar significance: 'The year-long growth of his hair stands for plant growth and ripening of the crops, the cutting of his hair at the end of the year-long ripening process makes the universe fit again for a new productive cycle' (ibid.: 217).

and horses with speed through the performance of the *aśvamedha* (SB 13.1.9.3–5). Moreover, animals were viewed as being placed in their proper environment, whether domesticated or wild, riverine or mountainous (BSS 15.16) as a result of the sacrifice.[24] The performance of the *vājapeya* was thought to ensure success in agriculture, prosperity, wealth and nourishment (SB 5.2.1.25). More generally, the *rājya*, thus sanctified, was defined in terms of *anna* and *paśu* (ibid.: 8.6.2.11). The notion of the *rājā* ensuring general well-being was implicit in the non-ritual context as well, evident in the statement (GDS 8.2) that four types of beings, viz., trees, creatures that move with the help of their feet, winged creatures and those that creep, depend on the *rājā*.

The role assigned to the human *rājā* in cosmogonic speculation marks a break with the traditions of the divine *rājās* in a number of respects. The relatively limited or undeveloped traditions associated with Varuṇa and Soma were replaced by the systematic, all-encompassing possibilities ascribed to Prajāpati. This meant that the *rājā* claimed to be able to ensure general well-being and prosperity, and aspired to a virtually all- pervasive influence.

At another level, reiterating such claims in the sacrificial context ritualized the understanding of creation and marginalized other possibilities. These included the notion of creation as a mystery, evident in its association with *māyā*. While conceiving of creation as the outcome of a sacrifice made it, at a certain level, comprehensible, it meant that a domain which was previously inaccessible to all was now conceived of as accessible to a privileged few, this in turn providing a basis for social differentiation.

The consequences of the treatment accorded to the possibilities associated with Soma were somewhat similar. This may seem paradoxical, given the fact that Soma's creative activity, conceived in terms of procreative intercourse, could be 'understood', unlike Varuṇa's use of *māyā*. However, owing to its simple, striking, human analogy, it could be understood by all. What both concepts

[24] Besides, the incorporation of the *soma* sacrifice in the *vājapeya* (SB 5.1.3.1) and in the form of the *daśapeya* in the *rājasūya* (ibid.: 5.4.5.4–19) meant a reiteration of the cosmogonic elements which characterized this basic ritual.

possessed was a certain universality—if Varuṇa's *māyā* was universally incomprehensible, Soma's act was universally understood. Hence knowledge or the lack of knowledge of either possibility could not provide the basis for socio- political or ritual differentiation. It is this which probably explains the fact that neither of these possibilities were incorporated within the later definition of *rājya.*

The role assigned to or assumed by the human *rājā* vis-à-vis cosmogonic knowledge and activity thus distanced him from his divine counterparts. At the same time, the process distanced him from most people as well—he was thought to ensure general well-being through ritual activities which were regarded both as an exclusive privilege and as a duty. Hence the *rājā* could, and probably did, claim exemption from participation in the actual process of production, as he was thought to ensure its success by sustaining the cosmic order. At the same time, the widespread benefits which were thought to ensue from the performance of such rituals would have ensured popular support for their performance. The shifting perception of the cosmogonic roles of the *rājā* thus both reflected and contributed to far-reaching changes.

IV

The changing relationship between the *rājā* and his people, implicit in the assumption of a distinct cosmogonic role by the former, is also evident when one turns to the issues of control over produce and productive resources.

Both Varuṇa and Soma were conceived of as prosperous (PVB 24.18.8, 9), with the former being occasionally referred to as *viś-vavedasa*, literally the possessor of everything (RV 5.67.3). He was connected with grain, especially barley (e.g. SB 2.5.2.1, SSS 14.7.1), with cultivated plants in general (SB 5.3.3.8) and, to a lesser extent, with cattle (e.g. RV 5.69.2). In this sense, Varuṇa's position was closer to that of the *virāj* and contrasted with the *śreṣṭha*, *adhipati* and *svarāj*. However, unlike the *virāj*, Varuṇa's connection with wealth was not one of identification or instrumentality. Although as important, this was not one of his typical attributes.

Wealth was, in a sense, more characteristic of Soma, who was

conceived of as *rayipati* or lord of wealth (RV 2.40.6). Besides plants were described as *saumya*, that is, of or belonging to Soma (SB 7.2.4.26), who was associated with cattle and the waters as well (RV 1.93.2, 5, SB 12.7.2.2). If such attributes are reminiscent of Indra's, other associations were analogous to those of Prajāpati and the *virāj*. These include the identification established between Soma and food in general (e.g. PVB 6.6.1, SB 7.2.2.11) and with *devānām anna* or the food of the gods in particular (SB 11.1.3.3), as well as with *prāṇa* or the vital life force (ibid.: 7.3.1.2). This meant that Soma's relationship to wealth could not be reduced to an appropriative one.

The association with wealth envisaged for the divine *rājās* evidently proved inadequate for their human counterparts. Hence the rituals which legitimized *rājya* were conceived of as a means of acquiring access to produce and productive resources. The material benefits which were thought to accrue from the performance of such sacrifices included the ability to eat, supposedly acquired through the *rājasūya* (AB 7.35.6) and *vājapeya* (PVB 18.6.8, SSS 15.1.2). The latter sacrifice was, in fact, equated with *anna* and *peya* (food and drink, SB 5.1.3.3, SSS 15.1.4–6), while the *aśvamedha* was regarded as a means of acquiring food from the four quarters (SB 13.1.1.4). All three rituals were, moreover, envisaged as means of acquiring *paśu* (PVB 18.7.3–4, SB 13.1.2.3, ApSS 18.10.6). Occasionally, moreover, claims to resources were widened, as is evident from the view (BSS 15.5) that the *aśvamedha* was a means of obtaining the cow, horse, goat, sheep, rice, barley, beans, sesamum, gold and serving men in particular, and wealth, nourishment and prosperity in general. These claims were more comprehensive than those envisaged for the *śreṣṭha* or the *adhipati*, who generally attempted to acquire food and animals or cattle.

There is, besides, evidence of a debate on the control over the earth by *rājās* which has no parallel in myths or in the context of other positions of status. This was obviously an issue which was acquiring significance in a changing socio- economic situation. The story of Viśvakarman Bhauvana, the *rājā* in question, occurs fairly often in the brahmanical tradition (e.g. AB 8.39.7, SB 13.7.1.15,

SSS 16.15.3), suggesting that the reiteration of the problem and its resolution were regarded as important. According to the story, Viśvakarman Bhauvana gave away the entire earth as *dakṣiṇā* after performing the *aindramahābhiṣeka* and the *aśvamedha*. At this, the earth threatened to dive into the ocean in protest. Needless to say, the *rājā*, faced with such dire consequences, expressed his generosity otherwise.[25]

The manner in which the problem was posed is in itself revealing —the question was not explicitly framed in terms of claims to ownership but was expressed in terms of the right or otherwise to give. A similar definition underlay the more general discussion on the granting of land (presumably limited areas, SB 7.1.1.4), which was resolved by stating that the consent of the *viś* was required by the *kṣatriya* who wished to make such a gift.

The definition of ownership in terms of generosity rather than in terms of absolute claims to exploit or enjoy resources probably reflects an attempt to conceptualize a changing economic relationship in terms of existing categories of analysis, and the inherent contradictions of the process. In fact, definitions and criteria of generosity were in themselves subject to change, becoming more socially differentiated. Ultimately, the later Dharma Sūtras reflect a situation where the *rājā*'s absolute claims to ownership, untrammeled by notions of generosity, were well-nigh total, exemplified by the recognition of claims to treasure trove (GDS 10.35, VDS 3.13) and to *svam* (literally one's own) or the property of a man who died without recognized heirs (e.g. ADS 2.6.14.5, GDS 28.43, BDS 1.10.18.16, VDS 17.83).[26] Both these claims implied a specific assertion of control—in the first case over the entire land of the realm, and in the second over the people who inhabited it.

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[25] The resolution envisaged in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Ram 1.13.38, 40) is different. Here, Rājā Daśaratha was conceived of as giving the earth, but the priests return this as they feel they lack the strength to protect it. Similarly, Vyāsa, after Yudhiṣṭhira's *aśvamedha*, was conceived of as refusing to receive the earth as *dakṣiṇā* (Mbh 14.91.7, 8). It is likely that the epics reflect a later situation, in which the earth was viewed as an object rather than as a subject.

[26] The only exception was in the case of the property of *brāhmaṇas* (BDS 1.5.11.13, VDS 17.84, GDS 28.42, 43).

It is evident that the control of resources was acquiring importance for the later Vedic *rājā*. Hence, while still being identified with the possibly earlier notion of *rājya* typified by Varuṇa and Soma, and the presumably prestigious traditions associated with them, he was, at the same time, attempting to define *rājya* on a different, more material basis. This was achieved and legitimized through new, composite rituals. Simultaneously, efforts were made to extend the definition of resources by elaborating on the types of animals or grains to which the *rājā* claimed access. The increased specificity in the human context was probably related to the tendency to extend the sphere of influence of the *rājā*—if different areas were associated with different produce, or if different social categories produced or controlled different goods, the forging of ties of exchange with such groups or areas would have necessitated the framing of the demands of the *rājā* in terms of specific resources. It was probably only at a later stage that the demands of the *rājā* were expressed in more universalistic terms, as a fixed share of the produce, irrespective of its specific nature.

Turning to procreation, not surprisingly, both the divine *rājās* were invoked for the purpose. What is remarkable, however, is the association of Varuṇa with the female, into whom Mitra (PVB 25.10.10) and Indra (SB 12.9.1.17) were conceived of as pouring *retas* or semen. What was envisaged through such conceptualizations was probably a continuum between the poles of masculinity and femininity, with the less masculine being defined as feminine vis-à-vis the more masculine. The fact that Varuṇa was conceived of as less masculine would also suggest that the definition of *rājya* associated with him was closer to that of *vairājya* than *svārājya*. It is likely that this explains his marginalization within the brahmanical tradition and his supersession by Indra in a society where gender stratification was sharpening.[27]

It is also likely that Varuṇa's role in procreation was viewed as ambiguous on account of these associations. Hence, although he was invoked for progeny in general (e.g. RV 5.69.3, SGS 1.17.9,

[27] Varuṇa's association with the waters, suggested by the very name of the god (M. Ghosh 1959: 286) is also significant in this context, as the latter were regarded as typically feminine.

PGS 1.9.5) and sons in particular (e.g. AB 7.33.2, SGS 1.5.11), the outcome was occasionally viewed as flawed. This is particularly obvious in the legend of Śunaḥśepa, where Hariścandra was thought to obtain a son, Rohita, from Varuna, on condition that he would sacrifice him to the god.

A similar tension vis-à-vis offspring is reflected in the myth of Varuṇa and Prajāpati which 'explained' the performance of the *varuṇapraghāsa* (SB 2.5.2.22–23). Varuṇa was supposed to have seized the *prajā*, leaving them with nothing except their breaths. Ultimately, Prajāpati freed them from Varuṇa's grasp by performing this sacrifice. While such a ritual was probably explicable in view of the uncertainties surrounding childbirth, its specific form meant that the transfer of control of *prajā* from Varuṇa to Prajāpati was viewed as beneficial. Given the distinctive attributes of each deity, this legitimized a more masculine, even supra-physical understanding of procreation and condemned the alternative, less differentiated understanding as potentially dangerous.

Soma, unlike Varuṇa, was consistently envisaged as masculine, the fluid being identified with semen (SB 3.8.5.2). He was, moreover, conceived of as the first husband of all women (e.g. RV 10.85.40).

On the human plane the notion of procreation runs through the rituals which legitimized *rājya* as a recurrent theme. The very name *rājasūya*, for instance, was derived from the root *su*, which may be conjugated as *sunoti*, press (the *soma* plant), *suvate*, impel or consecrate and *sūte*, procreate (Heesterman 1957: 72). This could imply both a general regeneration as well as the birth of the *rājā* (Coomaraswamy 1978: 9), which was specifically ensured through the initiation (SB 5.3.5.19) which formed part of the *aśvamedha* (ibid.: 13.1.7.1) as well. Besides, the ritual was viewed as a means of ensuring the birth of offspring (e.g. SB 5.2.4.1)[28] and sons (AB 7.33.6, ApSS 18.17.11). The last was sought to be achieved through the recitation of the Śunaḥśepa legend. Both the recitation, regarded as potentially generative, and the procedures for acquiring sons envisaged in the legend, were non-physical. In the legend, Hariś-

[28] A prayer for offspring formed part of the *vājapeya* as well (ApSS 18.5.15).

candra was supposed to have obtained a son by praying to Varuṇa, while Viśvāmitra acquired Śunaḥśepa in a ritual context. If anything, this suggested that the *rājā*, himself 'born' supernaturally through the sacrifice, could acquire sons through similar means without participating in the physical process of procreation.

This disjuncture between the *rājā* and physicality was even more explicit in the *aśvamedha* which included the enactment of sexual intercourse between the *mahiṣī* or chief wife of the *rājā* and the slaughtered horse (ASS 10.8.9, SSS 16.3.33) as a means of ensuring procreation (*prajanana*).[29] At the same time, it was recognized that the *rājā* who refrained from sexual intercourse would benefit from the participation of his wives in the ritual, the former being restored in lustre, strength, animals and prosperity (SB 13.2.6.7). Thus the *rājā* was viewed as manipulating the instruments of procreation and ensuring generation without actually participating in the process.

The process itself was conceptualized as rather violent, typified by the use of the *āhanasya* or 'obscene' verses, replete with sexual allusions, while intercourse was being mimed. The word is derived from the verb *ā+han*, 'which in the *āhanasya* has the erotic meaning of "beating" the female with the penis' (Parpola 1986: 48).

The focus on the wife in this particular context could, at the same time, have been interpreted in more ways than one. In a sense she would emerge as the central, visible, active figure, the embodiment of fertility and the powers associated with it, as opposed to the *rājā* whose role in the ritual was more passive. The treatment of the wife as a symbol could have thus been characterized by a certain ambivalence.

Thus, the ritualization of procreation in the context of *rājya*,

[29] The centrality of this episode to the sacrifice is evident from its depiction on the commemorative coins of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I (Altekar 1957: 66, Chhabra 1986: xxv, xxxi). The description of Daśaratha's *aśvamedha* also conforms to the prescriptions of the later Vedic tradition, with Daśaratha deciding to perform the sacrifice in order to obtain a son (Ram 1.8.2) and Kauśalyā cohabiting with the animal (ibid.: 1.13.27) which was approached by the other wives as well (ibid.: 1.13.28). The horse was probably symbolic of the generative power of the *rājā* which was spread through the realm through which it passed (Gonda 1969: 114).

while including the use of symbolic *mithunas* as in the *soma* sacrifice, occasionally extended beyond this. This is evident, on the one hand, in the *aśvamedha*, where the procreative pair of the *mahiṣī* and the sacrificial horse carried the symbolism of the *mithuna* to near-realistic levels, and in the *rājasūya* on the other, where the use of the Śunaḥśepa legend eschewed the use of even symbolic *mithunas*. The use of a range of divergent possibilities may have been a means of extending the influence of the *rājā* who aspired to acquire the support of different groups of people by adopting (and adapting) a variety of ritual practices.

While the *rājā* was masculine, the procreative mechanisms envisaged for him did not involve the physical act, as in the case of Varuṇa or Soma—he was, somewhat like Prajāpati, conceived of as above physicality. In this sense, the notion of procreation, like that of creation, sanctified through rituals, distanced the *rājā* from the people in general, and women in particular. At the same time, as in the case of productive resources, the *rājā* was regarded as ensuring the very basis of procreation (e.g. GDS 8.3).

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The structuring of creation and procreation were not the only areas in which the actions of the human *rājā* reinforced processes of socio-political differentiation. As important was the changing pattern of distribution of productive resources and produce associated with the *rājā*.[30]

Distribution was not a typical function of Varuṇa. Prayers to him for wealth are rare, and it is evident that generosity was not amongst his distinguishing features. This may indicate that controlling or disbursing resources may not have been amongst the central functions expected of the *rājā*, especially in the early Vedic situation.

The attributes of Soma were also somewhat unique. While he could be invoked by the man desiring cattle or food (BAU 2.1.3),

[30] I will distinguish between the resources acquired in the sacrificial context and those acquired through other means, focusing here on the former.

and the *soma* sacrifice was a means of attaining both, Soma was not only identified with what was distributed, but was thought to be destroyed or dispersed in the very process of distribution. This is evident from the characterization of Soma as the food of the gods (SB 11.1.3.3), who was killed (ibid.: 11.1.2.1), presumably to serve as food for his fellows. This conception was somewhat similar to that of the *virāj*, but contrasted sharply with that of the human *rājā*, who was conceived of as eating his people, especially in the later Vedic tradition.

Unlike his divine counterparts, the human *rājā* was conceived of as both receiving and giving produce (including what may be regarded as luxury goods) and productive resources, and evidently aspired to control and manipulate a range of distributive mechanisms. This is apparent from the rituals which legitimized *rājya*. The changes introduced in the distributive network as a result of the intervention of the *rājā*, and the legitimization of such interventions, contained the potential for transforming the social and economic relationships which were regulated through such exchanges.

One of the most striking features of rituals such as the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha* was the transfer of material resources to and from the *rājā*. This has occasionally been viewed as a process of circulating wealth (Heesterman 1959: 257), involving the reintegration of resources in the *rājā* and their subsequent dispersal. While the notion of circulation may have justified ritual exchanges, the impact of such transactions was not evenly felt—some social categories benefited at the expense of others, and the process did not result in even the temporary impoverishment of the *rājā*.

That receiving or obtaining wealth was an integral part of these rituals is evident from both prescriptive and narrative literature. The use of verses was recommended in the *rājasūya* to ensure that the *kṣatriya* sacrificer received gifts (AB 7.34.3). In more tangible terms, the *ratnins* or jewels, the chief supporters of the *rājā* were expected to provide the materials required for the *iṣṭis* or sacrifices which were performed in their houses during the ritual (Heesterman 1957: 49). That gifts were actually received by the *rājā* is also suggested by the description of Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* in the *Mahābhārata*. Given the fact that the sacrifice and its outcome are

intrinsic to the development of the narrative of the epic, it is likely that, despite elements of exaggeration, the account of Yudhiṣṭhira's gains would have corresponded with popular perceptions of what was expected to accrue to the successful *yajamāna*. The list (Mbh 2.47) includes animal skins decorated with gold, horses, camels, cattle, clarified butter in gold pots, slave women, jewels, sheep, goats, gold, asses, fruits, honey, blankets, swords with ivory handles, seats, vehicles, beds, chariots and elephants. While these were supposed to be brought by those who came to the sacrifice, wealth was also evidently collected by Yudhiṣṭhira's brothers who embarked on special expeditions for the purpose (e.g. Mbh 2.23.24).

Receiving or obtaining wealth was also a characteristic of the *aśvamedha*. Such wealth could be appropriated from *brāhmaṇas* who were ignorant of the significance of the ritual (SB 13.4.2.17, ApSS 20.5.15, 16) or from kinsfolk (LSS 9.1.14). The need to appropriate wealth for the ritual is also reflected in Yudhiṣṭhira's preparations for the *aśvamedha* where he has qualms about extracting tribute from the other rulers who were already grief-stricken (and presumably impoverished) on account of their participation in the fratricidal war (Mbh 14.3.14).[31] It is likely that the *vājapeya* was also associated with acquiring resources, as is suggested by the notion that the chariot used in the ritual was a means of obtaining wealth (SB 5.1.4.3).

The wealth thus acquired was put to a variety of uses. Part of it went to create the opulent setting for the sacrifice, evident in stereotyped descriptions of sacrificial posts being covered with gold (Mbh 14.87.5, Ram 1.13.19), and the sacrificial area being lavishly decorated. Besides, sacrifices such as the *aśvamedha* involved the slaughter of hundreds of animals.

Such displays of wealth had certain important consequences. They demonstrated the prosperity of the *rājā* to all those who

[31] Ultimately Yudhiṣṭhira does manage to appropriate the wealth deposited to the north of the Himalayas, from the mythical no-man's land of the Uttara Kurus (Mbh 14.64.15, 16). Besides, *rājās* brought jewels, women, horses and weapons for him (ibid.: 14.86.13). The two *aśvamedhas* described in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are also characterized by the *rājā* receiving wealth (Ram 1.12.29, 7.91, 92).

witnessed the ritual. Besides, some of the wealth received as gifts or tribute was removed from circulation instead of being recycled in the same form. In this sense, such displays, like potlatches, would have limited the potential for creating gift-credit (Gregory 1982: 61). In other words, the wealth which the *rājā* received was diverted from the network of gift-exchanges and converted into a form of socio-political prestige. The removal of wealth from circulation in this fashion also implied that potential rivals were denied access to these resources and were consequently impoverished (ibid.).

Part of the resources obtained were also used for a more generalized redistribution. This included supplying food to all those who attended the sacrifice (R.S. Sharma 1983a: 77), evident in the description of the *rājasūya* (Mbh 2.30.50) and the *aśvamedha* (Ram 1.13.11) in the epics.

While food was offered to all participants, it is likely that the more prestigious visitors (who may have contributed or collected substantial gifts or tribute) were given valuable presents as well (Mbh 2.30.51, Ram 7.92). Such exchanges enabled the *rājā* to acquire a reputation for generosity. The *rājā*'s generosity was not however uniform.

More important, only some participants, viz., the officiating priests, were eligible to receive the *dakṣiṇā* which accompanied these rituals, and which was often substantial. For instance, the *rājasūya* is explicitly described as a *śatasahasra dakṣiṇā* sacrifice (with a *dakṣiṇā* of a hundred thousand (possibly) cattle, SSS 15.16.19, ApSS 18.8.2), and although this figure may have been exaggerated, and the actual transaction probably involved five thousand to ten thousand cattle (Heesterman 1957: 162), the number of animals was significantly higher than that prescribed for the *soma* sacrifice and its variants.[32]

The *dakṣiṇā* prescribed for the *vājapeya*, was, as noted earlier, characterized by the reiteration of the number seventeen, symbolic of Prajāpati, with prescriptions for giving a minimum of seventeen

[32] As with other rituals, some of the *dakṣiṇā* prescribed for specific parts of the *rājasūya* was clearly symbolic. For example, for the *ratnīnāmhavīṃśi*, the animals prescribed as *dakṣiṇā* varied in accordance with the deity to whom the offering was made (e.g. BSS 12.5).

of each kind of object,[33] including cattle, horse-drawn chariots, horses, oxen, slave women adorned with gold ornaments (*niṣkas*) and elephants with gold seats (ASS 9.9.14).[34]

The *dakṣiṇā* for the *aśvamedha* included the four directions of the realm, to be given to the four principal sacrificial priests (SSS 16.9.18–21, ApSS 20.10.1, LSS 9.11.1–2). The giving away of the land by the *rājā* was regarded as controversial, as noted earlier. Its attempted ritualization may not have involved an actual transfer, but was probably a means of asserting and sanctifying the *rājā*'s claims to ownership. While this may not have been entirely successful, it permitted the discussion of a possibility which was evidently acquiring greater significance.

The giving away of the wives of the *rājā* (ApSS 20.10.2) probably had somewhat similar implications. While it may have underlined 'the marital character of the bond between the sacrificial patron and the brahman' (Heesterman 1959: 245), it was also an assertion of the control of the *rājā* over his wives, who could be treated as objects to be granted to the priests.

The *dakṣiṇā* for the *aśvamedha* also included ritual objects of gold and silver (BSS 15.3) and four thousand *niṣkas* (ibid.: 15.4). The quantities to be transferred were often deliberately left undefined—in one instance (LSS 9.11.1–2), the sacrificer was expected to give till such time as the priests refused to accept any more.[35]

The ideal of transferring enormous quantities of wealth to *brāhmaṇas* during the *aśvamedha* was reiterated in legends and epics. *Rājās* like Udamaya Ātreya and Bharata Dauhṣanti, for instance, were reputed to have given ten thousand elephants and an equal number of slave women (AB 8.39.8). Daśaratha was supposed to have given ten thousand cattle, ten crores of gold and four times

[33] The number could optionally be raised to a hundred of each type (ASS 9.9.14).

[34] The lists in the other Śrauta Sūtras (SSS 15.3.12–15, ApSS 18.3.4, 5) show slight variations.

[35] The *aindramahābhiṣeka*, another composite ritual which legitimized *rājya*, was characterized by a *dakṣiṇā* of cattle, four-footed animals and *hiraṇya* or gold (AB 8.39.6).

as much silver (Ram 1.13.41), and Yudhiṣṭhira to have given the enormous sum of a thousand crores of *niṣkas* (Mbh 14.91.7).[36]

The emphasis on the generosity of the *rājā* to priests persists almost throughout the brahmanical tradition in both sacrificial and non-sacrificial contexts. This is evident from the *dānastutis* (literally the praise of gifts) in the *Ṛg Veda*, which extol the generosity of donors of *niṣkas*, horses, cattle, chariots and women (*vadhūs*) (e.g. RV 1.126). The *dānastutis* probably provided the model for the compositions of the *brāhmaṇa* lute-player, who was expected to sing about the generosity and the sacrifices performed by the *rājā* (SB 13.1.5.6, BSS 15.8, ApSS 20.6.5).

Although the *rājā* was expected to be generally benevolent, *payasvin* or full of milk and hence a potential nourisher (PVB 18.9.21), and specific *rājās* such as Jānaśruti Pautrāyana were characterized as pious givers, bestowers of much wealth and keepers of an open house (Max Muller 1965: 56), it was the generosity of *rājās* to *brāhmaṇas* which was categorically recorded within the brahmanical tradition. These include references to the gifts of daughters by Śaryāta to placate the sage Cyavana (SB 4.1.5.7) and by Jānaśruti Pautrāyana to win over the *brāhmaṇa* Raikva (CU 4.2.4). Other generous *rājās* included Janaka (SB 11.3.1.4), who gave a thousand cows to Yājñavalkya for the knowledge of the *agnihotra*.

The recognition accorded to such gifts is not surprizing, as these evidently provided precedents for *brāhmaṇas* who sought to claim some of the resources of the *rājā*. However, the need to bolster such claims points to a certain degree of tension vis-à-vis the actual division of resources. This is also suggested by the non-ritualistic prescriptions of the Dharma Sūtras, where the *rājā* was specifically instructed to support *śrotriyas* (literally *brāhmaṇas* who were versed in the *śrutis*, or what was regarded as the revealed tradition, ADS 2.10.25.9, GDS 18.35), *brāhmaṇas* (ADS 2.10.26.1) and

[36] The giving of broadly similar categories of wealth by *rājās* is also referred to in the Buddhist tradition. King Okkaka was supposed to have performed the *assamedha*, *purisamedha* and *vāchapeya* and gave cows, beds, garments, adorned women and well-made chariots drawn by well-bred horses to *brāhmaṇas* (*Sutta Nipāta, Khuddaka Nikāya*, vol. I, p. 313, cited in U. Chakravarti 1987: 43).

snātakas (i.e. those who had completed the period of Vedic education, VDS 12.2). What is likely is that while the *rājā* probably did share some resources with *brāhmaṇas*, this was not as substantial as could be wished for by the latter. Hence, the *rājā* was constantly prodded on to be more and more bountiful, even if selectively so.

The transfer of resources to *brāhmaṇas*, whether it measured up to their expectations or not, had other implications as well. These goods, whether animals, women, gold or vehicles, like those used for ritual displays and the actual sacrifice, were removed from the networks of generalized gift-exchange. As a result, some productive resources could be selectively accumulated, as noted earlier, and this probably sharpened the process of socio-economic differentiation.[37]

The exchange of resources which the *rājā* attempted to regulate was thus asymmetrical. This asymmetry rested on the division and appropriation of labour in the form of resources and skills which were accumulated and employed differentially in the ritual context. The appropriation of labour was possible through what Gosden (1989: 369) describes as the 'trick of false generosity' which 'can be achieved precisely because there is no overall measure of labour. Instead the ranking of gifts operates to camouflage the flow of labour within the group, disguising the benefits the chief derives from controlling production, exchange and debt (ibid.).

The performance of sacrifices involved the appropriation of the labour of primary producers in the form of grain and animal produce. It also required access to the labour of crafts persons such as smiths, carpenters, weavers and potters, and to the labour involved in acquiring rare goods such as gold, jewels, elephants, etc. Besides, the labour of ritual specialists was also harnessed. Given

[37] As Gosden (1989: 373) observes: 'Consumption of benefits deriving from controlling gift production on the one hand, and reinvestment, on the other, are quite different strategies with contrary consequences. The former leads to the dissipation of resources, while reinvestment can provide an increased power base.' The creation of such a power base is reflected, to some extent, in the fact that most of the *brahmadeya* lands (land given to *brāhmaṇas*) referred to in Buddhist literature were supposed to be given by the *rājās* Bimbisāra and Pasenadi (*Dīgha Nikāya*, vol. I, pp. 109, 96, cited in U. Chakravarti 1987: 24).

the fact that there was no general standard of labour but rather a ranking of produce or skills, characteristic of a gift economy (Gregory 1982: 49), those who contributed relatively less prestigious goods or skills were rewarded with little more than food.

Thus, while all those who were present at and participated in the sacrifice benefited from the bounty of the *rājā*, the advantages were not identical. We have noted the possible effects of such differential generosity in the context of the soma sacrifice. Given the fact that the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha* were larger in both scale and scope, the impact of asymmetrical distribution in the context of such sacrifices was far-reaching.

These sacrifices were also characterized by the widening of the range of exchange networks, both in terms of the number and categories of participants, and in terms of the objects brought within the scope of such exchanges. Hence, control of these transactions ensured a commanding position for the *rājā*. It has been observed that those in a position to give what are regarded as prestigious gifts acquire control over their gift-debtors in societies where gift-exchanges are important (Gregory 1982: 51). Such a position of control was clearly open to the *rājā* who could receive a variety of prestigious goods from different sources, but who alone, by virtue of his control over all the channels of exchange, could grant any or all of these.

At the same time, some earlier forms of exchange were transformed in the ritual context. For instance, while the mock cattle-raid of the *rājasūya* (SB 5.4.3.1) has been viewed as the survival of a popular contest to determine the prowess or skill of the *rājā* (R.S. Sharma 1980: 57), the form in which this was manipulated in the sacrificial context is significant. Here, the victims of the raid were the *sva* or kinsfolk of the *rājā* and the cow which was ritually appropriated by the sacrificer was transferred to the *brāhmaṇa*. It is likely that originally cattle-raids were inter-community rather than intra-community affairs.[38] In such a situation, the *rājā* who led the raid was probably expected to share some of his booty with his kinsfolk. However, in the ritual, the *rājā*'s customary role was

[38] Duryodhana's attempt to seize Virāṭa *rājā*'s cattle, described in the *Mahābhārata*, probably provides an example of this.

virtually reversed—instead of providing a share to his *sva*, he was depicted as seizing their cattle, and the tension or conflict was now envisaged as existing within the community. The resolution which was postulated, viz., the expropriation of the wealth of the kinsfolk, legitimized through the ritual support provided by *brāhmaṇas*, tended to weaken the ties between the *rājā* and the kin-based community on the one hand, while strengthening those between the *rājā* and the *brāhmaṇa* on the other.

Another distributive process, that associated with dicing, was similarly modified. It has been suggested that dicing was a means of allocating rights of usage over land (Thapar 1984: 31) or wealth (Bhattacharya 1975: 42). Such a process would have ensured a more or less equitable situation.[39] However, in the *rājasūya* (SB 5.4.4.6–25), this mechanism was modified to ensure the victory of the *rājā* on the one hand and to establish a hierarchy amongst those associated with the passing of the sacrificial sword, the *sphya*, used for preparing the gaming ground, with the *sajāta* or kinsman (literally those sharing a common birth with the *rājā*) being placed last (ibid.: 5.4.4.19). The order in which the sword was passed was viewed as a means of weakening each subsequent recipient in comparison to his predecessors.[40] Thus, exchanges which were initially not directional were transformed beyond recognition.

[39] Woodburn's (1982: 443 ff) description of the institution of gambling amongst the Hadza is illuminating in this context: 'It (i.e. gambling) is one of the major means by which scarce and local objects are circulated throughout the country . . . The circulation is accomplished not through some form of exchange which would bind participants to one another in potentially unequal relationships of kinship or contract. The transactions are neutralised and depersonalised by being passed through the game . . . Individual effort, craft, skill, and particularly, the skill of trading with outsiders are quite variable. The attraction of gambling mobilises effort and skill but discounts its proceeds at random in a way which subverts the accumulation of individual wealth . . . It is paradoxical that a game based on the desire to win and, in a sense, to accumulate, should operate so directly against the possibility of systematic accumulation. Its levelling effect is very powerful.'

[40] The order in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is as follows—the *brāhmaṇas* (*adhvaryu*) to the *rājā*, to the *rājabhrāṭṛ* (the brother of the *rājā*), to the *sūta* or the *sthapati*, to the *grāmaṇī*, to the *sajāta*. The Śrauta Sūtras tend to include some or all of the *ratnins* in the list (e.g. BSS 12.15, ApSS 18.18.14).

It is evident then that the emergence and consolidation of the institution of *rājya* was interwoven with a range of developments. These resulted in the virtual transformation of earlier notions of *rājya* as exemplified by Varuṇa and Soma. The position of the human *rājā* in the later Vedic context was envisaged as somewhat similar, but by no means identical with that of the *śreṣṭha* and the *adhipati*. The *rājā*, like the *śreṣṭha*, was linked to cosmogonic speculation through the sacrifice. Although this was achieved by equating the *rājā/yajamāna* with Prajāpati, this was not incorporated mechanically as a variation of the *soma* sacrifice but at a different level altogether—by associating Prajāpati with the specific, complex rituals which legitimized *rājya* and which required the participation of a wide range of people. Thus the *rājā* could be perceived as both like and unlike the *śreṣṭha*. Such an ambiguous position was probably useful in extending the sphere of influence of the *rājā* to incorporate more and possibly different categories of people within the realm.

A similar ambiguity was evident regarding the control of productive resources. While the human *rājā*, unlike his divine counterparts, and unlike the *virāj*, aspired to control a range of resources, like the *śreṣṭha* and the *adhipati*, this was conceptualized, not in terms of absolute control, but in terms of control in order to distribute. Although this had a similarity with the distributive network associated with the *virāj*, this was at best superficial, as both the range and the nature of the *rājā*'s distributive activities were, as we have seen, vastly different.

What is apparent in all these spheres is a movement away from the attributes of leadership which were not hierarchically oriented to the leadership of a differentiated, wider, socio- political sphere. In the process, although the *rājā* continued to be associated with notions of general benevolence, this tended to be marginalized. The specific activities of the *rājā*, especially as these were related to distribution, ensured, not general well-being, but differential benefits, with the *rājā* himself emerging as one of the principal beneficiaries. Thus, the *rāṣṭra* did symbolize wealth, but this was not for everybody. As I hope to show, the social implications of the transformation of *rājya* were manifold.

?? Why could the Rājā legitimately
Rescue Kshatriya ??

Chapter Five

The Rājā (II): From Ṛtasya Gopa to Dhārmika Rājā

The *rāṣṭra* both unites and divides.

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.

I

The definition of *rājya* was thus gradually enlarged to encompass more and more people and social categories, with the *rājā* both extending and intensifying his influence or control over them. This process was interwoven with societal changes, which it influenced and by which it was in turn influenced.

The interaction between the *rājā* and the social order of which he was a part was a dynamic one, in which not only was the *rājā*'s role in society envisaged as changing, but the very definition and understanding of the social context was being transformed. While these developments were interrelated, I will distinguish between them for analytical purposes, focusing primarily on the former development for the present.

We had identified certain crucial social issues, including inter-*varṇa* relationships, kinship ties amongst men and gender stratification. The role of the *rājā* vis-à-vis these issues was somewhat similar but by no means identical to that of the *śreṣṭha*, who was construed as an ideal type for other categories of leaders or rulers, as mentioned earlier. For instance, while both the *rājā* and the *śreṣṭha* were envisaged as playing a role vis-à-vis the *varṇa* hierarchy, the *rājā* ultimately claimed an overarching authority which was far more comprehensive than what the *śreṣṭha* aspired to.

Of equal importance are the significant differences between the roles envisaged for the typical divine *rājās*, Varuṇa and Soma, vis-à-vis these issues, and those expected of their human counter-

parts. In some cases, such as the *varṇa* order, the divine *rājās* were assigned roles in the later Vedic tradition, which, to some extent, ran counter to their conceptualization during the early Vedic phase. However, this modification was evidently not enough to cope with the situation. Hence, the role envisaged for the human *rājā*, while incorporating some elements of the new characterization of the gods, very often extended beyond this.

The difference between the divine and the human plane was not uniform—it was sharpest in the context of the *rājā-viś* relationship and in the attempt to define a role for the *rājā* vis-à-vis the *varṇa* hierarchy as a whole, but was relatively less marked in the context of the relationship between the *rājā* and *brāhmaṇas*. While this may be partly due to the brahmanical bias of our sources, with the priestly authors attempting to portray their own relationship to the *rājā* as relatively stable and unchanging (and hence less open to challenge), it may also reflect a situation where the *rājā*'s relationship with certain social categories was changing more dramatically than with others.

When we examine the tensions within the kinship structure, the contrast between the divine and human *rājās* is, if anything, even more striking. In the early Vedic tradition, Varuṇa was one of the gods most closely associated with *asuratva* (e.g. RV 1.24.14), while in the later Vedic tradition, Soma was identified with Vṛtra (e.g. SB 3.4.3.13). Given the kinship connotations of the *deva-asura* and the Indra-Vṛtra struggles, this meant that the typical divine *rājās* were conceived of as belonging to the wrong camp. The human *rājā*, on the other hand was accorded a different role in these conflicts and their ritual resolutions, often being explicitly conceived of as identical with Indra in such situations.

Turning to gender stratification, we find a more or less similar development. Though Varuṇa and Soma were conceived of as gendered, masculine gods, their role in defining gender relations was rather different from that of Indra and Prajāpati, the divine *śreṣṭhas*. The role of the human *rājā* was conceived of as somewhere in between these possibilities.

I had suggested earlier that intervention in such issues was a means whereby leaders attempted to generate social support and

win acceptance. At the same time, these issues were becoming more complex. In this situation, an active role often meant supporting one social category against the other(s). As such, the human *rājā*, in the very process of acquiring social support and recognition, reinforced social differences.

The changes in the social role of the *rājā* were substantial. This is reflected in the replacement of the ideal of *ṛta*, common in the early Vedic tradition, by that of *dharma*, which later acquired central importance within the brahmanical tradition. The declining importance of *ṛta* is evident from the fact that the word occurs only seven times in the principal Upaniṣads (Bhattacharya 1975: 39). 'This shows that *Ṛta* originally stood for a different set of principles which were consistent with the early Vedic way of life, but eventually those principles were undermined and annihilated . . . ' (ibid.).

Broadly, *ṛta* implied a universal, holistic order. While *dharma* was also envisaged as universal, the specific definition of *dharma* varied according to social categories, with what was prescribed for one category being prohibited for the other. The implications of upholding *ṛta* and *dharma* were fundamentally different and the replacement of one role by the other meant, in effect, that the *rājā* was abandoning certain social functions and taking up others. In other words, the nature of *rājya* was transformed.

II

It is well-known that upholding the *varṇāśrama dharma* was regarded as one of the basic functions of the *rājā* within the brahmanical tradition. However, this role of the *rājā* was not coeval with the existence of *rājya*. In other words, although the institution of *rājya* may be traced back to the early Vedic tradition, *rājās* were not initially associated with establishing or maintaining the *varṇa*-based order. The gradual ascription of *varṇa* to divine and human *rājās* may be viewed as one aspect of the process whereby the *rājā* was integrated within the *varṇa* hierarchy.

In the early Vedic tradition, *kṣatra* was one of the characteristic attributes of Varuṇa. In fact, four of the five occurrences of the

word *kṣatriya* in the *Ṛg Veda* are associated with him (e.g. RV 5.68.3, Choudhuri 1981: 38, Deshmukh 1933: 214, Griswold 1971: 135). This association continued in the later Vedic tradition as well (e.g. SB 9.4.2.16, BAU 1.4.11). Soma was also conceived of as endowed with *kṣatra* (Kapadia 1959: 217, BAU 1.4.11), which was thus clearly an attribute connected with *rājās*.

This connection was explicitly reiterated through the rituals which legitimized *rājya*. For instance, the initiation ceremony of the sacrificer for the *rājasūya* (SB 5.3.5.20, BSS 12.9) was regarded as a means of acquiring *kṣatra*, while the *yajamāna* was thought to be reborn from the womb of *kṣatra*, represented by his wife, in the *vājapeya* (BSS 11.11).[1]

While the emphasis on *kṣatra* suggests a certain continuity between the early and the later Vedic tradition, there are indications that the definition and scope of *kṣatra* were changing. In the early Vedic tradition *kṣatra* had universalistic connotations of 'dominion, supremacy, power, might' (SED: s.v.), but in the later Vedic tradition the power associated with *kṣatra* was defined in more specific ways. This is evident from the equation between the *rāṣṭra* and *kṣatra* (AB 7.34.4). The *rāṣṭra*, apart from indicating the sphere of influence of the *rājā*, was tending to be identified with specific social and economic configurations. Hence, the equation of *kṣatra* with *rāṣṭra* meant that the former was now viewed as power which was exercised within a particular context. This is evident from the association of the ability to eat with *kṣatra* (SB 8.7.1.2). This signified both an ability to intervene in and control existing or emerging exchange mechanisms and an increasingly exploitative relationship between social categories regarded as eaters and others regarded as food. Thus a relatively oppressive definition of power was gaining acceptance. It is likely that the human *rājā* in the later Vedic context attempted to appropriate the entire range of connotations associated with *kṣatra*. This probably enabled him to conceal the real, oppressive nature of his power within a broader definition.

[1] The notion of the *rājā* being reborn endowed with *kṣatra* was reinforced by the equation of the throne on which he sat during the *rājasūya* with the womb of *kṣatra* (SB 5.4.4.3).

At the same time, both the divine (e.g. BAU 1.4.11) and the human *rājā* (e.g. SB 1.3.2.19) were explicitly or implicitly being defined as *kṣatriyas* or *rājanyas*. This was also equated with what was later standardized as the second category of the four-fold *varṇa* order.[2] The emphasis on identifying the *rājā* as a *kṣatriya* was a means of incorporating him within the *varṇa* framework. Thus, there were two contradictory tendencies at work—one favouring the assimilation of the *rājā* into the *varṇa* order, and the other favouring a distinctive identity. As will be evident, the *rājā*'s role vis-à-vis specific *varṇas* and the order as a whole, was characterized by a certain amount of tension.

III

We had seen how the social category of the *viś* was thought to be of basic importance for the *rājā* in both the early and the later Vedic tradition. Many divine *rājās* were identified in terms of the *viś* (e.g. Agni RV 2.2.8). The human *rājā* was, likewise, proclaimed in terms of the *viś* in the *aśvamedha* (ApSS 20.4.3) and the *rājasūya* (SB 5.3.3.12).

That the existence of the *viś* was intrinsic to that of the *rājā* was also recognized in analogies, with the *rāṣṭra* and the *viś* being equated with the *sāman* and *ṛc* (BSS 3.17), that is the Vedic hymn and its component verses respectively. As the hymn was comprised of such verses, this would indicate that the *viś* including one or more communities, formed the basis out of which the *rāṣṭra* was constituted. It also suggested that the *rāṣṭra* included a number of distinctly identified but more or less structurally similar social categories.

This process of incorporation would have involved a number of developments. On the one hand, the *rājā* who attempted to extend his sphere of influence had to contend with the leaders of other *viś*. On the other hand, he had to establish a relationship of control and support with those who were brought within the

[2] Very often, as in the Dharma Sūtras, the duties prescribed for the *rājā* coincide with those prescribed for the *kṣatriya*.

rāṣṭra. Of these two activities, the first necessitated either the absorption or the elimination of alternative leaders or patterns of leadership. The second, on which I will focus for the present, was associated with attempts to define and regulate the relationship between the *rājā* and the *viś*. Such attempts were fairly varied—stressing the common bonds between the *rājā* and the *viś*, differentiating between the *rājā/kṣatra* and the *viś*, and, related to this, asserting the supremacy of the former vis- a-vis the latter. Occasionally, efforts were made to achieve these ends more or less simultaneously, as for instance, in the *aśvamedha* and *rājasūya*. Elsewhere, one aspect of the relationship was emphasized at the expense of others. As noted earlier, the exploration of a range of possibilities points to a relatively fluid situation of socio-political transition, where the attempt to establish stratified political relations was constantly challenged.

The novelty of the *rājā-viś* relationship as it developed during the later Vedic phase is, to an extent, reflected in the paucity of myths connecting the divine *rājās* to this theme. Thus, while both Varuṇa and Soma were conceived of as endowed with *kṣatra*, they were rarely identified as representatives of this category vis-à-vis the deities who were regarded as representatives of the *viś*, that is the Maruts and the Viśvedevas. In this respect, as in many others, they present a contrast to Indra. This probably reflects the difficulties inherent in associating the more universalistic deities with roles which varied according to particular social circumstances. It is also likely that the specific role envisaged for the *rājā* vis-à-vis the *viś*, that of an oppressor, did not 'fit' very well with the established characterization of Varuṇa and Soma. Hence, attempts were made to resolve the *rājā-viś* relationship through rituals and prescriptions rather than through myths involving the divine *rājās*.

One of the most outstanding examples of such resolutions was the use of the *pāriplava* cycle in the *aśvamedha* (SB 13.4.3.3–15, ASS 10.7, SSS 16.2.1–30, etc.). This cycle consisted of units of ten days which were repeated throughout the period when the sacrificial horse was let loose to wander. Each day of the cycle was associated with a distinctive deity, a special category of traditional lore and a *viś*, split into two levels, one consisting of those who were present

at the sacrifice and the second of those whom they were supposed to represent. Thus, each *viś* was conceived of as endowed with a deity, a body of sacred lore, and was, moreover, equated with a distinct natural or supernatural category (see Table I for details). In a sense then, the stereotyped lists associated with the *pāriplava* cycle provide us with a map of social relations, codifying a wealth of information.

The divine *rājās*, for instance, can be split into two distinct categories—one including early Vedic deities or personages such as Manu, Yama, Varuṇa, Soma and Indra, and the second, possibly non-Vedic, including Arbuda Kādraveya, Kuvera Vaiśravaṇa, Asita Dhānvan, Matsya Sāmmada and Tārkṣya Vaipśyata. What seems likely is that in an attempt to widen the definition of *rājya* and incorporate more and more people within the *viś*, deities specific to certain regions or social groups were accorded recognition within the sacrificial cult. Initially, these deities were considered equal to their Vedic counterparts, each being associated with a single day's worship. Nevertheless, the very process of assimilation probably reduced them to a secondary status, evident in the paucity of subsequent references to them, and in the order in which they were arranged—the Vedic gods by and large ranked higher than their non-Vedic counterparts, who were, at the same time, encompassed within the framework of the Vedic cult by the position accorded to Indra, who was placed last.

The difference evident between the two categories of deities becomes sharper when one turns to the *viś* ascribed to them. The Vedic gods were associated with human and superhuman categories—including *manusyas*, *pitṛs*, *gandharvas*, *apsaras* and *devas* (human beings, patrilineal ancestors, masculine and feminine celestial beings and deities respectively), while the non-Vedic gods were associated with categories which can at best be described as subhuman and at worst as anti-human—including serpents, *rakṣas*, *asuras*, water creatures (probably fish) and birds.

Each of these ten categories was supposed to be represented by people who were present at the ritual. The Vedic gods were associated with householders (*gṛhamedhins*), elders (*sthaviras*), handsome young men, beautiful women and learned *brāhmaṇas*, and

these people, like the deities ascribed to them, encompassed the other people within their fold. Besides, they were endowed with what were viewed as positive social attributes. For instance, the *gṛhamedhins*, as their very name suggests, represented a distinct social, economic and ritual order, centring around a particular form of household organization. Briefly, this was a patrilineal household, the locus for the production of *anna* and *paśu*, for legitimate exchange, and ritual activities. The *sthaviras* were elders who may have been respected on account of their wisdom, while the handsome young men and women were probably valued on account of what were regarded as positive sexual attributes. The last social category, the *brāhmaṇas*, owed their status to their access to and virtual monopoly over prestigious ritual activities.

As opposed to this, the representatives of the second group were defined in terms of activities which did not conform to the norm. Those versed in serpent lore, or those with knowledge about fish (probably fisherfolk) or birds, were obviously differentiated from agricultural or pastoral groups. Similarly, those defined as robbers (*selagas*), or as living on usury (*kusīdins*) operated within systems of exchange which were different from those which were considered acceptable. While the inclusion of the *brahmacārin* (as an alternative or in addition to bird-catchers) within this group may at first sight seem surprising, it is probable that this was an attempt to incorporate a category following ascetic practices within the brahmanical framework by identifying them with *brahmacārins*.[3]

The assimilation of these groups within the ritual was accompanied by the appropriation of their traditional lore, which was to be recited or performed on the day ascribed to them. What is noteworthy is that *brāhmaṇas* alone were accorded the role of disseminating the lore. In the process, it is likely that these traditions would have been modified to bring them into consonance with the central concerns of the brahmanical authorities. Hence, although these groups were recognized as important, the context within which the recognition was accorded suggested their subordinate

[3] This is also suggested by the other non-Vedic attributes associated with this category—viz., birds, the obscure deity Tārkṣya Vaipśyata and the Purāṇas.

status as well. The common designation of each group or community as a *viś* thus concealed important differences amongst them, which could crystallize into sharper social classifications. This was almost inevitable when such groups were brought into contact with one another in a context which was controlled or manipulated by a few categories to the exclusion of others.

The incorporation of diverse categories within the definition of the *viś* had other implications as well. While the *rājā* was clearly connected with his own *viś*, his links with others who were brought within the same classification were obviously less close, and had to be forged. It is likely that rituals such as the *aśvamedha* provided an important occasion for systematically establishing such ties.

At another level, it probably made the establishment of a different, more exploitative relationship vis-à-vis these categories more acceptable. While establishing such a relationship with the *rājā*'s own *viś* may have met with a certain amount of resistance, this was probably considered more appropriate towards those who were regarded as an integral but subordinate part of the wider definition of the *viś* which was emerging. Ultimately, what was viewed as the justified subordination of some social categories provided a precedent for extending a similar relationship towards others as well.

That a change was taking place in the *rājā-viś* relationship in general is amply documented from rituals and incidental references in the later Vedic tradition. The metaphor used to express this change is itself a telling one—that of eating, distinguishing between the *kṣatra* or the *rājā* who was regarded as the eater and the *viś*? who was viewed as his food. This was legitimized through rituals such as the *aindramahābhiṣeka* (AB 8.39.3) where the *rājā* was thought to be reborn as the eater of the *viś* (*viśāmattā*). This is also reflected in similes (e.g. SB 13.2.9.8) comparing the *viś* to *anna* or *yava* (food or barley), while the *rājā* was compared to the deer who ate such grain. The reiteration of the notion of eating, implying as it did the destruction and/or absorption of what was eaten, probably refers not to the actual destruction of people, but to the destruction of a less inegalitarian relationship between the *rājā* and the *viś* in favour of a more exploitative one.

Conceiving of the *viś* as food also implied the dependence of

the *rājā* on the former. After all, the eater could not survive without food. It is this which probably accounts for the recognition of the importance of the *viś* in rituals which legitimized *rājya*. This took a variety of forms.

One means adopted was to acquire or 'win' the *viś* through rituals. Thus, the *vājapeya* was regarded as a means of winning the divine and human *viś* (SB 5.1.3.5). Elsewhere (PVB 18.10.9) hymns symbolic of the *viś* were placed on either side of that representing the *kṣatra* to ensure that the latter was surrounded by the former and that the *viś* did not abandon the *kṣatra*. A similar attempt to ensure that the *viś* was stable and did not desert the *rājā* was incorporated in the *rājasūya* (SB 5.3.4.14). In a sense, the concern here was broadly similar to that envisaged in the context of the *soma* sacrifice.

The importance of the *viś* was also ritually recognized in the notion that it constituted the womb from which the *kṣatra* or *rājā* emerged. For instance, in the *rājasūya* (SB 5.3.4.11, 5.5.2.9), the *kṣatra* was conceived of as the embryo of the *viś*. Elsewhere (e.g. ApSS 16.32.4), the analogy was extended to equate the *viś* with the cow, the *rājanya* with the embryo, cattle with the embryonic membrane, the *rājā* with the calf and *bali* with the milk produced by the cow during the first seven days after giving birth (the *pīyūṣa*).

→ The close ties of near equality which bound the *viś* to the *rājā* are also suggested by the access which the former had to the rituals which legitimized *rājya*. For instance, the *vājapeya* could be performed by members of the first three *varṇas* (SSS 16.17.1–3). While the *viś* could not perform the *rājasūya* independently, a representative of this category participated in the *abhiṣeka* which was central to the change of status of the *rājā* (SB 5.3.5.14, BSS 12.9, ApSS 18.16.4). This was, moreover, viewed as a means of ensuring that the *viś*, amongst other *varṇa* categories, protected the *rājā* (SB 5.4.1.5). However, the situation vis-à-vis the *aśvamedha* was different, the *vaiśyīputra* (literally the son of a *vaiśya* woman), being explicitly denied the right to perform the ritual (SB 13.2.9.8).[4]

[4] As an extension of this, the *yajamāna* who failed to perform the *aśvamedha* was regarded as equal to the *rājanya* or the *viś* (SB 13.4.2.17).

Thus, while the *viś* had more or less equal access (at least theoretically) to some rituals which legitimized *rājya*, and played a central role in conferring legitimate status in others, this possibility was not universally recognized.

Of equal importance is the fact that, none of these rituals was conceived of as incorporating alternative goals. In this sense, they presented a contrast to the *soma* sacrifice. Thus, while the *viś* could perform the *vājapeya*, this did not involve challenging the existing or emerging social order—in other rituals such as the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha*, the role of the *viś* was envisaged as supportive but subordinate. It is likely that the very scale of these sacrifices made it difficult for commoners to even attempt to perform them, unlike the *soma* sacrifice. Hence, each occasion on which they were actually performed reiterated the difference between the *viś* and the *rājā*, apart from providing an occasion for the transfer of resources from the former to the latter, as noted earlier.

While the *viś* was thus denied the option of contending for equal status with the *kṣatra* or even limiting its power through rituals, these were used to reinforce socio-political differences between the two by denying the importance of the *rājā-viś* connection, evident in alternative definitions of the *rājā*'s ritual birth. While the possibility of the *rājā* being born from the *viś* was recognized, he was occasionally conceived of as being born from the womb of *kṣatra* or *brahma*. In other words, efforts were made to substitute the *rājā-viś* relationship by other ties.

Simultaneously, these rituals were used to structure the *rājā-viś* relationship in hierarchical terms more amenable to the notion of eater and food. For instance, in the *vājapeya*, the *rājanya* and *vaiśya* were both given cups of madhu or honey, then the *vaiśya*'s cup was exchanged for one of *surā* or ordinary liquor (SB 5.1.5.28). As a result of this, the *yajamāna* was thought to be endowed with truth, prosperity and light, while the *vaiśya* was endowed with the negative attributes of falsehood, sin and darkness or ignorance. In the *aśvamedha* (SB 13.2.9.6), the *kṣatra* and *viś* were equated with the male and female respectively. Given the emergence of gender stratification referred to earlier, the equation of one partner with positive attributes or a dominant social category and the other with

negative attributes or a dominated social category would have justified the exploitation of the one by the other.

Occasionally, as in the *rājasūya* (AB 8.36.4), chants were manipulated to ensure that the *viś* and the *śūdra* were subservient. Similarly, the *aśvamedha* was thought to render the *viś* obedient and subservient rather than refractory and equal (SB 13.2.2.15, Eggeling 1963e: 303). This was sought to be achieved by ascribing the prestigious sacrificial horse to Prajāpati, while the other sacrificial animals were assigned to lesser deities. As suggested earlier, the need to manipulate rituals to ensure such ends meant that the threat of the *viś* deserting or challenging the claims of the *rājā* may have been rather real.

Rituals were also used to establish ties with those who were probably emerging as the leaders or the dominant members of the *viś*. These included the *grāmaṇī*, who was explicitly identified as a prosperous (BSS 17.49, SSS 2.6.7) *vaiśya* (SB 5.3.1.6), and *sūta* (BSS 18.2). Both were included in the list of eight *vīras* or valorous men in whose company the *rājā*'s *abhiṣeka* was performed (PVB 19.1.4) as well as in the company of the *ratnins* or jewels whose support was sought in the *rājasūya* (SB 5.3.1.5–6).[5]

The role of the *rājā* vis-à-vis the *viś* thus underwent a number of changes. During the early Vedic phase, while the *rājā* and the *viś* were bound together, the relationship was viewed as natural. However, with the attempt to extend the *rājā*'s sphere of influence to incorporate more and different people within the scope of *rājya*, certain changes were inevitable. In a sense, this attempt was a means of acquiring access to a range of produce and productive resources. At the same time, to be successful, such an attempt presupposed access to these resources which were often employed and obtained in ritual situations. The need to acquire resources as well as their acquisition tended to transform the very nature of the *rājā-viś* relationship, which shifted from one based on the sense of belonging to one another to one of superordination and subordination.

[5] The functions attributed to the *ratnins* and the *vīras* will be discussed in the next chapter.

However, the fact that the new relationship had to be established and legitimized through rituals, indicates that although the *rājā* attempted to assert control over some of the resources of the *viś*, this was not easily acquiesced to. Hence, the *rājā* had to establish alliances to buttress his claims. One such alliance, especially valuable in a situation where ritual provided possibly the most important mechanism of social control, was forged with the *brāhmaṇas*.

Finally, the *rājā*'s role vis-à-vis the *viś*, while somewhat similar to that of the *śreṣṭha*, was, in a sense, more fully developed and more clearly under the control of the former. This role, moreover, contrasted with that of the *virāj* who was not conceived of as functioning in a situation of social stratification. The development of this dimension of *rājya* meant that the *rājā* was, on the one hand, distancing himself from the ideals associated with *vairājya*, while on the other hand, he was outdoing the *śreṣṭha* in his success in establishing a hierarchical relationship vis-à-vis the *viś*. However, initially at least, this was possible only through the support of the priests.

IV

The *brahma-kṣatra* relationship, like the *kṣatra-viś* one, acquired significance during the later Vedic phase and developed in conjunction with the latter. Although an alliance of sorts was arrived at, this was a relationship marked by continuous tension, with constant attempts to assert the superiority of the priestly category vis-à-vis *ksatra*. These insistent assertions probably reflect a response to the challenge posed by the *rājā* or the *kṣatriya*, who, though dependent on priestly support, tried to assert his control over the priesthood, just as he attempted to convert his economic dependence on the *viś* into a relationship of dominance and subordination.

Both Varuṇa and Soma were equated with *kṣatra* vis-à-vis *brahma* in myths incorporated within the later Vedic tradition. This was, in itself, a new development, contextualizing the deities endowed with *kṣatra* in relation to *varṇa* categories instead of as wielders of universal power.

As in the case of Indra and Agni, the myths where Varuṇa sym-

bolized *kṣatra* point to a strained relationship between *brahma* and *kṣatra*. In one instance (SB 4.1.4.1–6), Mitra and Varuṇa were equated with *kratu* and *dakṣa* (intelligence and skill), *brahma* and *kṣatra*, and while the former was regarded as an *abhiyantṛ* (controller), the latter was a *kartṛ* or doer. In each of these dualities, the attributes associated with Mitra, and by extension with *brahma*, were regarded as superior to those of Varuṇa. This is evident from the statement (ibid.) that when the two were separated, Mitra was able to stand without Varuṇa, but not vice versa. Ultimately, Varuṇa requested Mitra to unite with him and agreed to acknowledge his supremacy.[6] The moral of the story was underlined in the human context by the conclusion that while a *brāhmaṇa* could do without a *rājanya*, although he prospered if he found a *rājā*, a *kṣatriya* could not do without a *brāhmaṇa*, and could not succeed without the latter's assistance.

The Mitra-Varuṇa duo, equated with *brahma* and *kṣatra*, were also characterised as masculine and feminine respectively (PVB 25.10.10. SB 2.4.4.19). Somewhat less explicitly, *brahma* and *kṣatra* were equated with Mind and Speech (Manas and Vāc, PVB 11.1.2, 3), whose unequal relationship has been referred to earlier. Such equations reinforced the notion of an ideal order between the two social categories. By equating *varṇa* with gender categories, they also suggested a similarity between the two forms of stratification which may have been useful in 'explaining' or justifying both.

If Varuṇa's ultimate subordination suggests parallels with Indra's acquiescence to Agni's claims, there are certain differences as well. As noted earlier, Indra and Agni were regarded as engaged in a contest for establishing sole control over the gods. This element is relatively muted in the Varuṇa-Mitra myth. Besides, unlike Indra, Varuṇa's opposition to the brahmanical order was not conceived of in terms of the destruction of *brāhmaṇas*. Instead, the resolution envisaged was in terms of complementarity. This points to the acknowledged importance of the relationship for both parties.

The myths about Soma's *varṇa* affiliations were more or less

[6] The myth embodied, at the same time, a modification of the Mitra-Varuṇa relationship, which was envisaged as non-hierarchical in the early Vedic context (Gonda 1972: 18–19).

similar. In one instance (AB 2.10.6), Bṛhaspati and Soma, representing *brahma* and *kṣatra* respectively, were thought to be responsible for instigating whatever was done. Here, while the hierarchical order was recognised, it was emphasized that co-operation between *brahma* and *kṣatra* was generally beneficial.

The resolution of the problem of the mutual relationship of the two categories through myths was however clearly not enough to ensure an identical situation of harmony and the subordination of the *rājā* to the *brāhmaṇa* in the human context. Hence, legends within the brahmanical tradition reiterated a similar message in more explicit terms. One such legend was that of Vṛṣa Jāna, the *purohita* of the *rājā* Tryāruṇa Traivṛṣṇa Aikṣvāka (JB 3.94, 95). A dispute took place regarding which one of them was responsible for the death of the son of a *brāhmaṇa*. Responsibility was fixed on the *purohita*, who avenged himself by preventing the Ikṣvākus from cooking food by casting a spell on their fires. The story ends with the propitiation of the angry priest and the restoration of the 'proper' order.

The characterization of the hostility of the *rājā* towards the *purohita* as self-destructive, implicit in the story, was carried to its logical conclusion in the legend of the *rājā* Atyārati Jānantapī (AB 8.39.9), who violated his promise to the *brāhmaṇa* Vāsiṣṭha Sātyahavya, and was consequently destroyed. That such stories were not simply priestly constructs but formed part of popular perceptions as well is evident from the frequent use of the theme in the Jātakas (Ghoshal 1966a: 77).

At the same time, legends and analogies touch on what was the Achilles' heel of the brahmanical position, a weakness which probably provided *rājās* with a certain amount of leverage and manoeuvrability. This was the dependence of the *brāhmaṇas* on *rājās* as gift-debtors vis-à-vis gift-creditors, a spin-off of the exchanges of *dakṣiṇā* and *dāna* referred to earlier. While this dependence was rarely overtly acknowledged, it could not be totally suppressed. In one instance, the gods following Indra were compared to *brāhmaṇas* following in the train of a *rājā* (SB 1.2.3.2), while elsewhere (AB 7.35.3), a typical *brāhmaṇa* was characterized as an *ādāyin* (i.e. an acceptor of gifts). The subordinate status of the

gift-debtor is occasionally explicitly referred to in legends such as that of the daughters of Uśanas and Vṛṣaparvan (BDS 2.2.4.26–27), where the daughter of the *rājā* claims to be superior to the daughter of the *brāhmaṇa* on the ground that the former's father gives but does not receive, whereas the latter is dependent on his generosity.[7]

While the *brāhmaṇa* was thus dependent on the *rājā*, the latter also required the support of the former for legitimizing his position and ensuring the subordination of the *viś*. Hence, it is not surprising that the relationship between the priest and the *rājā* was articulated through the rituals which legitimized *rājya*. In this context, the notion of their ideal hierarchical order was reiterated with a certain emphasis on their complementarity. For instance, hymns (PVB 18.10.8) and chants (AB 8.36.1) were arranged in a particular order in the *rājasūya* to ensure the *brahma* preceded the *kṣatra*, the order being implicitly (PVB 18.10.8) and occasionally explicitly (AB 8.37.5) recognized as beneficial to the *rāṣṭra*.

The benefits which the *purohita* or the *brāhmaṇa* could confer on the *rājā* who accepted his subordinate role were occasionally enumerated. In one instance (AB 8.40.2), the *purohita*, equated with the protector of the *rāṣṭra* (*rāṣṭragopa*), was regarded as capable of conferring *svargaloka*, *kṣatra*, *bala*, *rāṣṭra* and *viś*, that is heaven, attributes of power and strength, and a sphere of influence, including people, on the *rājā*.

The role of the priesthood in ensuring support for the *rājā* was manifest at two interrelated levels. On the one hand the priest actively participated in specific rituals such as the *abhiṣeka* which legitimized the *rājā*'s status in the *rājasūya* (SB 5.3.5.11, BSS 12.9, ApSS 18.16.2) and the *aindramahābhiṣeka* (AB 8.39.5).[8] Besides, the *rājā*'s status was officially proclaimed by the priest (SB 5.3.3.12). Thus, the *rājā* depended on the priesthood for both legitimacy and publicity. It is this which probably explains the attempts on the part of the *rājā* to secure the support of the *purohita*, who was

[7] The story has its parallels in the dialogue between Śarmiṣṭhā and Devayānī in the *Mahābhārata* (Buhler 1965b: 237–238).

[8] This was also recognized in the epics (Mbh 2.48.10) and the Jātakas (Ghoshal 1966a: 16–17).

included amongst the valorous men whose presence was required for the *rājā*'s *abhiṣeka* (PVB 19.1.4).

At another, broader level, the relationship with the priesthood provided a means whereby the *rājā* could claim access to the sacred. As noted earlier, the sacrifice provided the *rājā* with an occasion to assert his cosmogonic role, and to demand produce or productive resources generated by the *viś*. In such a situation, a certain dependence on the priesthood was inevitable, given their claims to ritual expertise in particular, and their role as mediators between gods and men in general.

Despite their mutual dependence, the relationship between the *brahma* and *kṣatra* was often recognized as conflict-ridden in the ritual context. This is evident from the prayer recommended in the *rājasūya* to ensure that the *brahma* and the *kṣatra* protected the sacrificer from one another (AB 7.34.4). Here this hostility was envisaged as stemming from attempts to assert exclusive control over the *yajamāna*/*rājā* (ibid.: 7.34.5–6).

Occasionally, the tension was sought to be resolved by asserting the unique status of the *brāhmaṇa* vis-à-vis the *rājā*. For instance, in the *rājasūya* the *rājā* was proclaimed as belonging to a particular *viś*, whereas Soma was declared to be the *rājā* of the *brāhmaṇa* (e.g. SB 5.3.3.12).[9] In other words, the priesthood claimed an ability to establish the crucial *rājā-viś* connection, and at the same time, asserted their independence of this tie. This was visualized in terms of an exemption from exploitation—the *brāhmaṇa* was literally regarded as *anādya* or not to be eaten, unlike other social categories (e.g. SB 5.3.3.12, 9.4.3.16 etc.).

And yet, escape from the scope of *rājya* was impossible for the priests in practice. In part this was owing to the fact that just as they could use rituals to legitimize *rājya*, they themselves acquired a certain status through their ability to conduct such rituals. In this situation, these sacrifices often provided occasions for differentiating amongst the priesthood as well. The most outstanding example of this is provided by the *daśapeya*, which formed a part of the *rājasūya*. This was a variation of the soma sacrifice in which ten

[9] The same notion is reiterated in the epics (e.g. Mbh 8.42.42).

brāhmaṇas participated. Each of them was supposed to be a *soma* drinker, and was ideally expected to possess ten similarly qualified ancestors (PVB 18.9.4, SB 5.4.5.4, ApSS 18.21.3). While it was recognized that these genealogical connections could be difficult to establish,[10] the insistence on such ancestry meant that only a select few could aspire to officiate at the sacrifice. In this context, the exclusive status of the *rājā* who could secure the presence of such men as well as that of the priests who 'proved' their ancestry by participating in the ceremony would be made obvious to competitors, whether *rājās* or *brāhmaṇas*, as well as to all who witnessed or heard about the sacrifice.

At the same time, other means for resolving or containing the disruptive potential of the relationship were explored. These included establishing an embryonic relationship between the two and claiming superiority for the *brahma* on the ground that the former constituted the *yoni* or womb of the *kṣatra* (BAU 1.4.11). In a sense, this provided the *rājā* with an alternative to the earlier embryonic connection—that with the *viś*.[11]

The *purohita* evidently attempted to strengthen his hold over the *rājā* by reiterating the importance of his role between the gods and the *rājā*. The appointment of a *purohita* was regarded as basic for the fulfilment of the sacred duties of the latter, evident from the notion that the gods did not eat the offerings made by a *rājā* who was without a *purohita* (AB 8.40.1), and in the insistence on appointing one (BDS 1.10.18.7, VDS 19.3).[12] At another level,

[10] Hence, an alternative of referring to ten deities in case the names of ten ancestors were not known is suggested (SB 5.4.5.4).

[11] Viewing the form but not the content of the relationship somewhat differently, Heesterman (1957: 226–227) observes: 'The distinctive feature of Indian kingship is the intimate connection of royal and priestly power, the marriage-like bond between the king and a *brahman*, his *purohita* . . . There is, however, yet another not less important marriage-like bond, the one established between the king and the people . . . The relation king-people was ruled out of the game in favour of the relation king-*brahman*.'

[12] Occasionally, the specific functions of the *purohita* are enumerated as: assisting the *rājā* in battle, equipping him with the required armour and chanting verses to ensure his success (AGS 3.12.1–12). That these claims had a certain validity in practice is evident from the Jātakas, where *purohitas* are described as

this is reflected in the recommended use of the *purohita's pravara* or ritual genealogy for the *rājā* (ASS 12.15.4, ApSS 2.16.10). This implied that the latter's genealogical connections were considered inadequate for obtaining access to the sacred, and hence had to be abandoned in favour of a priestly genealogy. However, there may have been some resistance to this. Hence, an alternative genealogy, meant for the *rājanya*, was accorded recognition within the tradition (e.g. ASS 12.15.5, ApSS 2.16.12).[13]

Occasionally, an effort was made to suggest a more or less identical status for both in rituals such as the *ṛtapeya* (BSS 18.35). This suggests that priestly claims to supremacy may not have been universally upheld and had to be modified to accommodate the growing power of the *rājā*.

A more or less equal status for the *brahma* and the *kṣatra* was also suggested in the *aśvamedha* where the *brāhmaṇa* and the *rājanya* lute-players who were expected to sing the praises of the sacrificer were, at the same time, envisaged as protecting him from both sides (SB 13.1.5.3). This would imply the sharing of a common function by the members of the two *varṇas*, even if the manner in which they fulfilled their designated roles was different.

The notion of different but equal status was reiterated through general statements in the later Vedic and post-Vedic brahmanical tradition. For instance, both the *rājā* and the *śrotriya* or learned *brāhmaṇa* were regarded as *dhṛtavrata* (upholders of the social order, SB 5.4.4.5). Elsewhere (GDS 8.3), both were thought to ensure *prasūti* or reproduction, and were conceived of as supports for the three basic categories of beings—the *devas*, *pitṛs* and *manusyas*—gods, patrilineal ancestors and men respectively (ibid.: 11.29).

While this occasionally extended to an actual sharing of functions, as for instance in the possibility of punishment administered by the *rājā* or penances prescribed by the preceptor, or the *purohita* for similar offences (e.g. ADS 2.5.10.14), there are indications that actual power was concentrated in the hands of the *rājā* (Anjaria

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conducting sacrifices, interpreting omens and participating in warfare (Ghoshal 1966a: 24).

[13] This consisted of a reference to Manu, Ilā and Pururavas.

1935: 199–200). In the Dharma Sūtras, for instance, the *brāhmaṇas* no longer claim to be beyond the jurisdiction of the *rājā* but attempt to regulate his intervention by delimiting legitimate and illegitimate activities. While the latter included destroying or appropriating the lives or property of *brāhmaṇas* (e.g. BDS 1.5.11.13, 1.10.18.11, GDS 10.17), the former included ensuring that they performed their duty (e.g. BDS 2.4.7.15, VDS 3.4).[14] Hence, although *brāhmaṇas* claimed an exclusive right to define *dharma* (BDS 1.1.1.14, GDS 28.51, VDS 1.4),[15] their dependence on the *rājā* for the implementation of norms was obvious.

The role of the *rājā* vis-à-vis *brāhmaṇas* was thus changing during the period under consideration. The shifts which are evident can be broadly enumerated as follows—the initial stage, reflected in the early Vedic tradition, when defining the relationship between the *rājā* and the *brāhmaṇa* was unimportant. This was followed by a phase where the relationship assumed importance for both, typified by myths, legends and rituals of the later Vedic tradition, which indicate that each sought the support of the other for different reasons. At the same time, each attempted to free himself from the element of subordination inherent in a supportive relationship in a stratified social context.[16] While the attempts of the *rājā* to break away from the relationship are not explicitly recorded within the brahmanical tradition (for obvious reasons), such attempts are hinted at in the undercurrent of tension which runs through the data analysed above. I had suggested that the *rājā* may have manipulated gift-exchanges to assert his control over the priesthood. At another level, it is likely that the option of opting out of the ritual framework, which was the basis of the *brāhmaṇa*'s power, was occasionally exercised. This could be achieved by proposing

[14] As an extension of this, Vedic learning came to a standstill on the death of the *rājā* (GDS 16.32).

[15] Virtually the sole exception to this occurs in ADS (2.11.29.15) where the right to define *dharma* is extended to all social categories.

[16] An example of the kinds of conflicts this created is provided by the legend of Janaka, where the *brāhmaṇas* describe him by the contemptuous term *rājanya bandhu* when referring to him amongst themselves (SB 11.6.2.5), but refer to him as *samrāj* when addressing him directly (ibid.: 11.6.2.2).

alternative definitions of the sacred, as was attempted, for instance, by Ajātaśatru (BAU 2.1.15) and Aśvapati Kaikeya (CU 5.18.1–5) and implicitly challenging the brahmanical claims to a monopoly in this sphere. By far the most outstanding of such challenges were posed by the Buddha and Mahāvīra, who, apart from being *kṣatriyas*, provided an alternative to the brahmanical faith which was evidently attractive to contemporary rulers.

The shifts in the brahmanical position vis-à-vis the *rājā* referred to above, were probably the result of such challenges. While these could be denounced, this alone was not adequate to contain them. Hence, compromises stressing complementarity and 'permitting' the *rājā* to intervene in a range of issues were devised. While the notion of permission may have been euphemistic, the *rājā* on his part rarely attempted to pull down what was a convenient facade for his growing power vis-à-vis the *brāhmaṇas*.

What is evident then is that the *brāhmaṇa-rājā* relationship ultimately shifted in favour of the *rājā*. This was, moreover, a new development—as we had noted, the *śreṣṭha*, and by extension the *adhipati* and the *svarāj*, did not, at any stage, aspire to or achieve such a position. Nevertheless, it is likely that the conflicts with other aspirants to political status predisposed *brāhmaṇas* to accept a more limited role and to settle for an alliance which accorded them a certain recognition. For the *rājā*, likewise, it was preferable to have the *brāhmaṇas* as allies rather than as antagonists, as the priests had access to communication networks not only with the gods, but with men as well. Hence, while the nature of the bond was occasionally questioned by both parties, the need for the bond itself was never denied.

V

The two interrelated socio-political processes which contributed significantly to the emergence of *rājya* crystallized around control over economic resources on the one hand and over the institutionalization of religious beliefs on the other. While claims to access to the sacred provided a mechanism for appropriating material resources, the latter in turn may have provided the basis

where does power lie?

political/military or religious level

for challenging old and/or creating new definitions of the sacred. At the same time, the range of both these spheres was expanding. In other words, new economic activities, including commercial activities, and craft specialization, were acquiring importance, and new definitions of the sacred, including ritual learning and mystic insight, were coming into focus. Although the three major socio-political categories—the *rājā/kṣatriya*, the *viś/vaiśya* and the *brāhmaṇa*—attempted to establish a monopoly over at least one of the two spheres referred to above, none of them could actually do so. Hence, although the status quo was not overthrown, it was probably contested almost continuously.

It is in this context that the attempt to either assign an overarching social authority to the *rājā* or the assertion of such a claim by the *rājā* needs to be viewed.[17] This was one of the means of widening the basis of legitimizing *rājya* by defining it not simply as something which could be acquired through specific rituals relevant in a particular context, but as something which was beneficial to and necessary for the entire social order. While the definition of the social order had a number of dimensions, I will focus here on the role which the *rājā* acquired vis-à-vis the *varṇa* hierarchy as a whole, which distinguished *rājya* from other forms of leadership/rulership referred to earlier.

Given the paucity of references to Varuṇa and Soma in *varṇa*-defined contexts, it is not surprising that they were not associated with either creating or maintaining the *varṇa* hierarchy. However, the later Vedic and post-Vedic context was qualitatively different from the early Vedic situation in which the core of the myths pertaining to Varuṇa and Soma was probably developed. So, for the human *rājā*, it was clearly important to assert a role vis-à-vis the new social order. Later Vedic rituals which legitimized *rājya* were therefore conceived of as a means of incorporating all four *varṇas* within the purview of the *rājā* and of establishing what was defined as the 'proper' hierarchical order amongst them.

[17] These processes need not have been mutually exclusive. In other words, the assertion of such a claim by the *rājā* may have been accorded recognition within the brahmanical tradition and would then appear in the historical record as a prescription or a duty which would be assigned to the *rājā*.

The most outstanding example of this was provided by the *rājasūya*, where the use of four distinct chants symbolic of the *brahma*, *kṣatra*, *viś* and *śūdra* (AB 8.36.4) conceived of as endowed with *tejas*, *vīrya*, *prajāti* and *pratiṣṭhā* (lustre, valour, procreative power and stability) respectively, represented the incorporation of the four *varṇas* with what were defined as their proper attributes. At the same time, the ritual was viewed as a means of ensuring that the last two *varṇas* were subordinate and dependent. This was sought to be achieved by a specific arrangement of the chants (ibid.). A similar attempt to ensure support and subordination at the same time is also evident in the recognition of the *govikartṛ* and the *pālāgala* who were probably *śūdras* (R.S. Sharma 1980: 55) as *ratnins* whose support was sought through the ritual, but whose presence had to be expiated by a propitiatory offering to Soma and Rudra (SB 5.3.2.2), to overcome the sin incurred through contact with *ayajñiyas* (literally those not worthy of participating in the sacrifice). In other instances (e.g. the *aśvamedha*, SB 13.1.9.1, 2), only the first two *varṇas* were expected to benefit from the performance of the ritual. Thus, the rituals which legitimized *rājya* were at the same time regarded as a means of incorporating and defining the social order of which the *rājā* formed a part.

It is obvious that there were problems in the attempt to resolve the *rājā*'s relationship with the *varṇa* order through rituals. While the participation of the representatives of the *varṇas* could be assured if this was viewed as a recognition of their importance, it may have been less forthcoming if this was explicitly treated as a means of ensuring subordination. I have mentioned the constant fear of the *viś* deserting the *rājā*. The fear of the *śūdra* attempting to gain access to and hence challenging the ritual framework was almost as strong in the post-Vedic brahmanical tradition. Besides, from the perspective of the *rājā*, dependence on rituals to manipulate or regulate the social order meant, in effect, a greater dependence on *brāhmaṇas*, which would have curtailed his effective authority. In such a situation, the need for alternative means of organizing the relationship amongst the emerging social categories was probably experienced at a number of levels.

It is likely that the recognition of the maintenance of the *var-*

ṇāśrama dharma as one of the unique duties of the *rājā* (e.g. GDS 11.9) was the result of these explorations. While theoretically the brahmanical authorities retained a certain control through their claims to define *dharma* this may have been less than what was directly exercised in the ritual context. Besides, they themselves were brought within the framework of *varṇāśrama dharma*, with the *rājā* being granted or asserting the right to enforce norms for them as well.

Given the scope of *varṇa*, within which all social categories were or could be theoretically encompassed, and the *āśrama* system, which spanned the major part of the life cycle of men belonging to the first three *varṇas*, the *rājā*'s social role was envisaged as potentially almost all-pervasive. And yet, there were obvious limits to the *rājā*'s ability to intervene and enforce norms throughout society. These were probably related to problems of communications and resources. The implementation of such norms required a well-established system of communication, whereby violations could be brought to the notice of the *rājā* and effectively redressed. This in turn implied the existence of an organizational network and the effective mobilization of resources to maintain it. Although the *rājā* was associated with a supportive network,[18] effective intervention in or surveillance of the day-to-day lives of people would have presented practical problems. While these are not explicitly acknowledged, they are implicit in the discussion on the implementation or enforcement of *varṇa*-related norms within the brahmanical tradition.

As is well-known, the Dharma Sūtras (and following them the Dharma Śāstras) lay down certain duties or occupations specific to each *varṇa*. While acquiring learning, getting sacrifices performed and giving gifts were common to men of the first three *varṇas* (e.g. BDS 1.10.18.2–4), teaching, performing sacrifices, and receiving gifts were specific to *brāhmaṇas* (ibid.: 1.10.18.2), the protection of people and acquiring wealth through warfare was prescribed for the *rājanya* or *kṣatriya* (e.g. GDS 10.7, 20), agriculture, cattle-rearing, and trade for the *vaiśya* (ibid.: 10.49) and serving the members

[18] For details, see Chapter 6.

of the three higher *varṇas* for the *śūdra* (BDS 1.10.18.5). Although ideally none of these prescriptions were expected to be violated, punishments were prescribed for some deviations.[19]

Both the issues which were selected for the intervention of the *rājā* and those which were tacitly recognized as being outside his purview are significant. In the first category, efforts were made to regulate ritual norms, with the *rājā* being expected to ensure that *brāhmaṇas* in particular fulfilled their prescribed duties, punishing those who deviated from the norm (e.g. VDS 3.4), as well as members of other *varṇas*, especially *śūdras*, who attempted to challenge the prescribed pattern in this sphere (e.g. GDS 12.4–6).

The other area of concern related to safeguarding control over productive resources by individual men in general (e.g. ADS 2.10.26.4–8) and the privileges of *brāhmaṇas* in particular (e.g. GDS 12.35), with theft being punished with varying degrees of severity. Besides, the *rājā* was conceived of as regulating, or rather preventing sexual unions, and by extension, procreation, amongst *varṇas* (e.g. BDS 2.2.4.7, GDS 23.14–16, VDS 21.1–5) with death penalty being prescribed for most violations.

The process whereby these three areas were identified as of crucial significance to the definition of *varṇa* and to the role of the *rājā* vis-à-vis the *varṇa*-based order is not explicitly discussed, but may be tentatively surmized. In the case of rituals, their value in terms of communicating and legitimizing notions of socio-political hierarchy rested, to an extent, on their being strictly controlled. After all, if rituals were performed by or were accessible to everyone, their exclusive nature and hence their usefulness in legitimizing a stratified social order would have been lost. Hence, the attempt to regulate access to rituals/ritual learning in particular, and the domain of the sacred in general, is not surprizing.

The second area identified, recognizing the access of individual men to productive resources, is significant in accepting a new definition of economic relations, where participants were no longer

[19] Besides, the provision for *āpad-dharma* or modification in duty when in distress, provided a convenient escape route whereby violations of the norms could be condoned within certain limits.

bound together by ties of gift-exchange. In a sense, as noted earlier, the very nature of such exchanges, especially as structured in the ritual context, permitted the consolidation and concentration of resources, which were withdrawn from general circulation. At the same time, there were other processes at work permitting the generation and concentration of resources outside the framework envisaged in the later Vedic tradition, where the basic resources were defined as *anna* and *paśu*. As is evident from the archaeological evidence, and from Buddhist and Jain traditions, the Ganga valley was witnessing the beginning of trade, craft specialization and urbanization during the period under consideration. While some of the resources generated by these processes may have been tapped within the ritual framework, others may not have been amenable to similar control. Thus, the relation of the *rājā* to those who controlled such resources had to be established on a different basis. One such basis was the recognition and protection of those who had acquired such resources, this in turn enabling the *rājā* to secure both social acceptance and material benefits.

The third area, regulating sexual relations and procreation, was, in a sense, linked to the concerns of the second. We have seen that offspring were frequently viewed as desirable, being encompassed within the definition of material well-being. Control over sexuality, especially female sexuality and procreative powers, was in part, a mechanism for ensuring control over procreation. Hence, distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate unions, and according recognition to the former, acknowledged the claims of men over women, just as the claims of the former to productive resources was accorded recognition.

At the same time, a number of elements of *varṇadharma* were left undeveloped. For instance, there are no references to punishing *kṣatriyas* or *vaiśyas* who did not make gifts or perform sacrifices. Nor are there references to punishments for *śūdras* who did not serve members of the higher *varṇas* or for *vaiśyas* who did not follow their prescribed occupations. In other words, the *rājā* could not, or was not expected to interfere in a number of spheres. This amounted to a tacit recognition of the autonomy of social categories vis-à-vis these issues. While this may have been dictated by considerations

of expediency, it is also likely that the areas identified as crucial to the definition and implementation of *varṇadharma* were selected because they permitted the consolidation of a new, socially differentiated support base for the *rājā*.

Thus, while the ritual or theological support of *brāhmaṇas* continued to be important, others, especially men who were gaining access to new and/or concentrating more established forms of resources within their individual control, were also conciliated. We had seen how the process of socio-economic differentiation may have, in part, resulted from some of the relationships envisaged for the *rājā* in the sacrificial context. This, as well as independent processes, led to the emergence of a more complex social order. In coming to terms with these changes, the *rājā*'s simple bonds with the *viś* were diversified to incorporate distinct ties with different social categories.

The maintenance of such a position required the constant reiteration of the connection between the *rājā* and his new supporters. This was attempted by locating the *rājā* within the context of specific elements of the kinship structure and gender stratification.

VI

The importance of conflicts which were defined in kinship terms as well as the tendency to obtain support from specific kinsmen by strengthening the ties which bound them has been referred to earlier. Efforts were made to define such patterns of support for the *rājā* as well. As a result, the *rājā* was identified with a more hierarchically ordered kinship structure to cement the bonds between him and those who were emerging into importance within this structure. This provided a new basis of identity between the *rājā* and at least some of those who were incorporated within his sphere of influence, and was hence an innovative means of winning support and legitimacy. In other words, an elaborate, pervasive analogy was developed to both describe and explain or justify a changing relationship to power.

As in the case of the *varṇa* hierarchy, the divine *rājās* and their established attributes contained very limited possibilities in this

sphere. In fact, very often, their attributes were conceived as negative in the changed circumstances. In other instances, the definition of the role of the human *rājā* vis-à-vis kinship structures extended far beyond what was envisaged for these deities. This is evident from both rituals and incidental references. Moreover, Indra, and to a lesser extent, Prajāpati, were viewed as more useful for the human *raja*.

The divine *rājās* were conceived of in terms of categories with whom they shared a common identity, defined as the gods or Ādityas in the case of Varuṇa, and plants in the case of Soma. Such conceptualizations suggested an underlying similarity and a relatively egalitarian relationship. On the human plane the closest parallel to such a concept could have been provided by the *sva* or *samāna* with whom leaders such as the *śreṣṭha* were associated.

However, the human *rājā* was rarely identified in terms of such categories. More important, the rituals which legitimized *rājya* were used to establish a hierarchical relationship between the *rājā* and such kinsfolk. For instance, although the *sva* or the *janya* could participate in the *abhiṣeka* during the *rājasūya* (SB 5.3.5.12), he often ranked last (e.g. BSS 12.9, ApSS 18.16.5) after representatives of the first three *varṇas*. The *sajāta* was also assigned the lowest rank in the order established through the passing of the sacrificial sword for preparing the dicing ground (SB 5.4.4.19). Besides, his cattle were appropriated during the mock cattle-raid. Thus the human *rājā* attempted to deny the importance of earlier, more egalitarian relationships with kinsfolk and replace these with more structured, hierarchically ordered ties.

As part of this process, the *yajamāna-bhrātṛvyal sapatna* struggle was assigned considerable importance in later Vedic myths and rituals. Here, the disjunction between the divine and the human plane is most striking. The attribute of *asuratva*, viewed as positive and creative, was fairly central to the conceptualization of Varuṇa in the early Vedic tradition. In the later Vedic tradition, however, the state of being an *asura* acquired negative connotations.

In this situation, the treatment accorded to Varuṇa is interesting. On the one hand, he was no longer referred to as an *asura*. At the same time, he was viewed as ambiguous (Kuiper 1983: 15) or

even dangerous (Renou 1953: 20) and was 'alarmingly liable to assume the aspect of Vṛtra' (ibid.). This identity was often explicitly acknowledged in rituals such as the *rājasūya*, where the lotus wreath used was regarded as symbolic of the *kṣātra rūpa* of Vṛtra and the *bharga* or splendour of Varuṇa (PVB 18.9.6), which was appropriated by the sacrificer. At another level, Varuṇa was occasionally assigned a different role, that of fighting, along with Indra and Agni, against Vṛtra (SB 2.6.4.2–4) and of protecting the sacrifice, along with Mitra, from the *asuras* and *rakṣas* (AB 6.27.1). However, these associations were rather untypical and could not be developed further.

The attempt to both negate and at the same time appropriate the qualities associated with Varuṇa reflect the contradictory pulls and pressures at work. Denying the importance of the relatively egalitarian and *virāj*-like values associated with Varuṇa was inadequate to cope with the complexities of the situation. Hence, the *rājā-yajamāna*, although attempting to acquire support on a different basis, continued to reiterate the importance of earlier attributes. Thus, an effort was made to appropriate the qualities associated with the deity in a stratified social context.

The position of Soma, although not identical, was somewhat similar. Like Varuṇa, he was envisaged as endowed with the positive quality of *āsurya* (e.g. RV 6.74.1) in the early Vedic tradition. Besides, while Soma was invoked against a variety of enemies such as the *amitra* (ibid.: 9.11.7), *rakṣas* (ibid.: 9.17.3), *śatru* (ibid.: 9.19.6), *dasyus* (ibid.: 9.41.2) and *abhimāti* (ibid.: 9.65.15), his invocation as a killer of Vṛtra (e.g. RV 1.91.5) derived more from his association with Indra, and was not intrinsic to his characterization (Deshmukh 1933: 286). What is more, he was explicitly identified with Vṛtra in the later Vedic tradition (e.g. SB 3.4.3.13), with the pressing and offering of Soma being equated with the killing of Vṛtra (ibid.: 1.1.4.8).

The contrast between the mythical/ritual association of the divine *rājās* and the attributes associated with their human counterparts could not be more striking. Virtually all the rituals which legitimized *rājya* were conceived of as representations of the *deva-asura*/Indra-Vṛtra struggle on the one hand, and were regarded as

the means of enabling the *rājā* to overcome his *bhrātṛvyal sapatna* on the other. For instance, the destruction of the *bhrātṛvya* or *sapatna* was recognized as a more or less consistent goal of the *rājasūya* (e.g. ApSS 18.9.9), this being equated with the destruction of Vṛtra (PVB 18.11.1, SB 5.2.3.7). A specific prayer was offered during the *abhiṣeka* to render the sacrificer free from *sapatnas* and *bhrātṛvyas* (SB 5.4.2.3). Similar associations are evident in the *aśvamedha* where the *sviṣṭakṛt* offering was described as a means whereby the gods killed the *asuras* (ibid.: 13.3.4.2) and hence as a means of ensuring a similar fate for the *bhrātṛvya* of the *yajamāna*.

Of equal significance is the building up of an association between the attainment of the *rāṣṭra* or the status of a *rājā* and the killing of Vṛtra. For instance, in the *rājasūya*, it was declared that Indra became a *rājā* after killing Vṛtra (ApSS 18.11.1). The sacrificer was, moreover, endowed with Indra's characteristic weapon, the *vajra* (BSS 12.9), in the course of the ritual. This notion was extended to the formula which accompanied the offerings during the *ratnīnāmhavīṃśi* (e.g. BSS 12.5), where the *ratnins* were expected to declare, 'This is our *rājā*, the killer of Vṛtra, may he, on becoming a *rājā*, kill Vṛtra'.

We had noted elements which characterized the *deva-asura* and Indra-Vṛtra and *yajamāna-bhrātṛvyal sapatna* struggle. Clearly, at one level, the human *rājā* was associated with these concerns through the ritual, appropriating the role of the *śreṣṭha*, often through an explicit identification of the sacrificer with Indra and his kinsman-enemy with Vṛtra.

At another level, the conceptualization of the typical divine *rājā* Soma, and to a lesser extent Varuṇa, as Vṛtra, was a new development in at least two respects. On the one hand, this marked a shift from the early Vedic identifications of these deities in that they were now associated with what were, from one perspective, evil or ambiguous attributes. On the other hand, this very association meant that their position vis-à-vis the developing ritual tradition of the later Vedic phase was changing, with their attributes being either marginalized, as in the case of Varuṇa, or appropriated completely, as in the case of Soma.[20] The Soma-Vṛtra identification

[20] The tension inherent in the transition is reflected in the occasional charac-

has been explained as being symbolic of the appropriation of the powers of a vanquished enemy (Drury 1981: 35–37). While this is likely, the shift needs to be viewed within the context of the definition of *rājya*, where, on the one hand, the human *rājā* was conceived of as being opposed to Vṛtra, on the other hand, his divine counterparts were identified with Vṛtra. As noted earlier, the Indra-Vṛtra struggle was, at the same time, viewed as ambiguous.

I had suggested that part of this ambiguity was explicable in terms of the destruction of relatively egalitarian ties of kinship. It is also likely that this was due to the implicit abandonment of the values or roles associated with the *rājā* in the early Vedic context, as typified by Varuṇa and Soma, and their replacement by different norms and ideals. Clearly, the *rājā* who was being identified with the killer of Vṛtra or Soma, and possibly Varuṇa, was beginning to be associated with different bases of support. To some extent, this meant the denial or weakening of the support provided by relatively egalitarian kinship ties, and their replacement by seeking and obtaining the support of those who were acquiring positions of importance within a more hierarchically ordered kinship structure and who were related to one another patrilineally. Not surprizingly, such ties were regarded as crucial for the human *rājā*.

Of the divine *rājās*, Varuṇa's associations with patriliny are rather infrequent. In fact, the mythology of Varuṇa in particular and the Ādityas in general was based on the recognition of matrilineal connections with the common mother Aditi. Varuṇa was thus conceived of as the son of a mother rather than of a father. Besides, he was rarely conceived of in paternalistic terms. This would indicate that initially, patrilineal connections may not have been particularly important for the *rājā*.

The other divine *rājā*, Soma, like Agni, was often conceived of as both the father (e.g. RV 9.86.10) and the son (e.g. RV 9.110.10) of the invoker or sacrificer. While his origins were not explored

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terization of Varuṇa and Soma as hostile deities. For instance, Varuṇa was thought to inflict all the distress experienced on earth (SB 4.5.7.7), while a prayer was offered to Soma (AB 1.3.2) to ensure that he did not injure the *prajā* and *paśu* of the sacrificer. It is likely that the deities were envisaged as hostile in a situation where the values associated with them were being negated.

systematically in myths, he was occasionally described as Prajāpati's son (SB 11.1.6.14) and was associated with the *pitṛs*, being referred to as *pitṛpīta* (i.e. drunk by the *pitṛs*, e.g. ApSS 1.8.3). In other words, although he was conceived of in patrilineal terms, this was not systematically developed.

The human *rājā*, on the other hand, was consistently associated with patrilineal genealogies, which were reiterated during the rituals which legitimized *rājya*. For instance, the *yajamāna* was proclaimed as the *putra* and *pautra*, that is the son and grandson of his father and patrilineal grandfather in the *rājasūya* (BSS 12.8). The genealogy was extended to the patrilineal great grandfather in the *vājapeya* (ibid.: 11.7). While the connection with the mother was also acknowledged in the former ritual (SB 5.3.3.12, ApSS 18.16.15), this was recognized only for a single generation. In other words, while matrilineal ties were not denied, patrilineal ties were recognized as both more significant and enduring.[21]

The rituals which legitimized *rājya* were also used as a means of strengthening the father-son bond. For instance, in the *rājasūya* (SB 5.4.2.8), the *yajamāna* gave the vessel containing the fluid used for the consecration to a *priya putra* (beloved son) to enable him to continue the valorous or virile acts of the father. In the same context, the father-son bond was reversed and restored (ibid.: 5.4.2.9) to ensure that both prospered. At another level, the importance of sons was emphasized through the recitation of the Śunaḥśepa legend (e.g. AB 7.33.1–6) where the wife was declared to be a companion, the daughter a source of misery and the son a light in the world beyond. Besides, sons of the *rājā* (*rājaputras*) as well as sons of important functionaries such as the *sūta*, *grāmaṇī*, *kṣattṛ* and *samgrahitṛ* were expected to protect the sacrificial horse during the *aśvamedha* (e.g. SB 13.1.6.2, 13.4.2.5, SSS 16.1.16,

[21] Patrilineal connections would have also been reiterated through the incorporation of variations of the *soma* sacrifice in such rituals. However, this was not regarded as sufficient to ensure claims to *rājya* as is evident from the story of Duṣṭarītu Paumsāyana (SB 12.9.3.1–2) who was driven away from a *daśapuruṣa rājya*, a *rājya* controlled for ten generations, ultimately regaining it through the performance of a sacrifice (ibid.: 12.9.3.13).

etc.). In other words, patrilineal identity was recognized as ritually significant, not only for the *rājā*, but for others as well.

The emphasis on patrilineal genealogies was most explicit in the case of the priests who participated in the *daśapeya*, where efforts were made to trace a genealogy through men related to either the father or to both parents for ten generations (e.g. ASS 9.3.20, 21, SSS 15.14.8, LSS 9.2.5 etc.). While this has been viewed as a means of rounding off the year and ensuring the continuity of the ancestral line (Heesterman 1957: 187), the selection of a single category of ancestors meant that they alone would be accorded importance to the exclusion of others.

This was evidently contested. In a variation of the *daśapeya* (BSS 12.18) the *sūta* and *grāmaṇī*, who may have been *vaiśyas*, as well as the *kṣattṛ* and *samgrahitṛ*, challenged the *brāhmaṇas* to name their matrilineal ancestors for ten generations, denying entrance to the sacred area to those who were unable to do so. However, an escape route was provided for those who were ignorant of their genealogies —they could either declare that a *vaiśyā* (a woman of the *viś*) was their mother or acknowledge Sāvitrī (probably the sacred chant) as their mother. The questioning of patrilineal norms is especially remarkable as it was particularly difficult for commoners to participate effectively in large-scale sacrifices. Such challenges, with the attempt to counter them, indicate that the development of a patrilineal definition of *rājya* ran counter to the earlier associations of the institution. It also points to the existence of alternative kinship systems, in which genealogical reckoning was not necessarily patrilineal.

It is likely that the need to cope with such challenges led to alternative developments. These attempted to connect the *rājā* with male householders at one level, eliminating, in the process, the need to ensure the support of the entire community, by focusing on that of individual, powerful men instead. For instance, rituals prescribed for the *gṛhapati* or householder were used to establish equations between him and the divine and human *rājās*. Such associations were developed in the context of the *agnyādheya* or the setting up of the sacrificial fire, which marked the beginning of the ritual career of the householder. This was described as the means whereby Varuṇa attained *rājya* (SB 2.2.3.1). The identity between the *rājā*

and the *yajamāna* was reiterated in the daily *agnihotra* (e.g. ApSS 6.14.7). Here, the *abhiṣeka* of the sacrificer was equated with that of Indra by the gods, this in turn being described as the means whereby the deity attained *rājya*. Elsewhere (SB 11.2.5.5), the *agnihotra* and the fortnightly new- and full-moon sacrifice were equated with the *aśvamedha*.

Such associations were developed during the *saṃskāras* or rites of passage as well, with the razor used to cut the boy's hair for the first time being equated with that used for Varuṇa and Soma (AGS 1.17.10, PGS 2.1.11). While it is unlikely that the performance of the domestic ritual was envisaged as leading to a dramatic transformation in the status of the *yajamāna*, it underscored the common bond between him and the *rājā*. By creating a sense of identity between them these rituals were probably useful in legitimizing the concentration of power. This was now possible at two distinct levels —one, the overarching level associated with the *rājā*, and the second, the domestic level, where the *yajamāna* or *gṛhapati* could now aspire to assert his dominance over the household. The fusion of these two levels was reflected in the use of the term *prajā* for the dependents or offspring of both the *rājā* and the householder.

That this attempt to defuse the challenge to the newly emerging hierarchical order was fairly successful is indicated by the gradual decline in the importance of some of the issues we have focused on. For instance, the *yajamāna-bhrātṛvya/sapatna* struggle is rarely referred to in the post-Vedic tradition. This would suggest that it was probably resolved with the emergence of a more hierarchically ordered kinship structure. Similarly, while the importance of the father-son bond in particular or patrilineal genealogies in general continued to be reiterated, there are few references to explicit attempts to overthrow or challenge these norms. Thus, the human *rājā* in the later Vedic period succeeded in consolidating his support base by identifying himself more closely with a differentiated kinship structure and by consequently subordinating the Varunic or Somic elements of *rājya* to values associated with Indra and Prajāpati. At the same time, the emphasis on a common householding pattern enabled the *rājā* to establish bonds of identity with men even apart from the connection envisaged in the context of *varṇa*.

Thus, the role of the *rājā* was once again universalized, but on a basis very different from the ties which had originally bound him to the *viś*.

VII

Underlying and related to the attempt to win support by linking the *rājā* with a hierarchically ordered kinship structure was an attempt to regulate relations between the sexes in a more stratified manner. This, once again, marked a departure from the attributes of the early Vedic *rājā*, as reflected in the conceptualization of Varuṇa and Soma.

While both deities were identified as masculine and assigned a role in procreation, we had noted that Varuṇa was conceived of as less masculine than most of the other gods. Besides, he was identified in relation to Aditi and thus lacked patrilineal connections. Although Soma was conceived of as more masculine and was occasionally located within the patrilineal framework, neither of the deities was explicitly or implicitly connected with the battle of the sexes, presenting a contrast to Indra and Prajāpati in this respect.

If the gender attributes (or lack of them) of Varuṇa and Soma are any indication, the early Vedic *rājā* was conceived of as functioning within a less stratified context. By contrast, in the later Vedic tradition and subsequently, the *rājā* was not only conceived of as operating within a situation of gender stratification, but was regarded as responsible for its establishment and/or maintenance. As I have argued earlier, it is likely that this was an attempt to widen and shift the support base of the *rājā*. In this specific context, it meant that the *rājā* was no longer envisaged as functioning with the support of both men and women, but attempted to acquire the support of one against the other. In the process, the model provided by Varuṇa and Soma was marginalized.

As important was the treatment of goddesses in the early and later Vedic tradition. In the *Ṛg Veda*, goddesses were occasionally conceived of as associated with the *rāṣṭra*. These included Vāc (RV 10.125.3) who was envisaged as describing herself as a *rāṣṭrī*[22] of

[22] The contrast between those gods and goddesses who were praised and those

the gods (ibid.: 8.100.10), with universalistic characteristics both in terms of the nature of power and in terms of the categories over whom this was exercised. She claimed to be able to wander with the principal deities such as the Rudras, Vasus, Ādityas and Viśvedevas, while supporting Soma, Tvaṣṭṛ and Pūṣan. At the same time, she was conceived of as exerting an all-pervasive influence extending beyond earth and heaven on the one hand and enabling people to eat, see and breathe through her powers on the other. Elsewhere (SSS 15.11.1) Vāc was conceived of as obtaining *svārājya*, *śraiṣṭhya* and *ādhipatya*, over all *bhūtas* or beings owing to her ability to control speech.

Occasionally, other less important *rājñīs* (feminine form of *rājā*) such as the serpent goddess[23] were also characterized in terms of universal benevolence. She was associated with the creation of plants and birds (AB 5.24.4) and was identified with the earth (PVB 4.9.6), with her worship being regarded as a means of obtaining support and all desires (ibid.). It is obvious that her attributes as well as some of those of Vāc were somewhat similar to those of the *virāj* and as such would have been considered disruptive in a situation of growing social stratification. Hence, it is not surprizing that her worship was marginalized, it being declared (SB 2.1.4.29–30) that this was unnecessary, as the very establishment of the sacrificial fire on the earth was a means of appropriating all that she could confer.

At another level, goddesses such as Aditi, while not *rājñīs* themselves, were bound through harmonious ties with *rājās*. For instance, Aditi was described as the mother of *rājās* (RV 2.27.7), with Varuṇa as her son, who upheld *ṛta*, while Uṣas was almost as closely associated with Varuṇa, being regarded as his *jāmi* or sister (ibid.: 1.123.5).

The myths suggest that, in a situation where *rājya* was exercised over a relatively undifferentiated society, men as well as women were conceived of as wielders of the benevolent influence implicit

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who were conceived of as praising themselves has been noted earlier (Chapter II).

[23] The Sarpa *rājñī* is not referred to in the early Vedic tradition and may have been incorporated from a different source.

in the notion. Nevertheless, there are no references (either general or specific) to human *rājñīs* in either the early or the later Vedic traditions, suggesting that women who aspired to such positions probably found it more difficult to attain recognition or legitimacy.

At another level, efforts were made to domesticate this possibility. This is evident from the marriage hymn (RV 10.85.46) where a prayer was offered to ensure that the bride would be a *sāmrājñī* amongst her father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and brother-in-law. As noted in the context of *vairājya*, such domestication meant, in reality, the curtailment of the legitimate sphere of influence of the woman, which was now defined in terms of the household rather than in terms of the entire universe as in the case of Vāc referred to above.

The tendency to both deny women access to the exercise of *rājya* and to use the mechanisms developed to legitimate it to enforce gender stratification were more systematically developed in the later Vedic context. Kinswomen whose presence was required for the rituals of legitimization were implicitly selected: in fact, the only kinswomen who qualified for participation were the wives of the *rājā*.

The most important of the wives was the *mahiṣī*. The name itself is significant—she was literally the equivalent of a she-buffalo and was not a *rājñī*. In other words, she was not regarded as the female counterpart of the *rājā*. While the *mahiṣī* was occasionally identified with Vāc (SB 6.5.3.4), this was probably reflective of the process whereby new situations/relationships were described in terms of existing categories of understanding. As is more than obvious, the *mahiṣī*, unlike Vāc, was conceived of as exercising her influence in relation to the *rājā* and had virtually no independent claims to importance.[24]

The *mahiṣī* figured amongst the eight valorous 'men' whose presence was required for the *rājā*'s *abhiṣeka* (PVB 19.1.4). Besides,

[24] O'Flaherty (1980: 164) regards the *mahiṣī* as a representative of the more benevolent aspects of female sexuality typified by the image of the cow, as opposed to what she describes as the mare- like, potentially untrammeled, and hence (from a patriarchal point of view) dangerous aspects of female sexuality.

To what extent do the earliest Vedas reflect the social patterns of the contemporary Indic civilization?

she, along with the *vāvātā* or favourite wife, the *parivṛktī* or abandoned wife and the *pālāgalī* or low status wife, were included amongst the *ratnins* (e.g. BSS 12.5). The same categories of women also participated in the *aśvamedha* (e.g. SB 13.4.1.8, SSS 16.3.33, 16.4.3, 4, ApSS 20.15.7).[25] Moreover, just as sons of important personnel were incorporated within the ritual, so also were their wives (BSS 15.1, ApSS 20.15.8).[26]

The significance of the participation of wives in the ritual was probably two-fold. It is likely that the recognition of the importance of their connection with the *rājā* may have conferred a certain status on them, as opposed to other kinswomen (and kinsmen apart from those connected patrilineally). At the same time, the structuring of their participation in terms of instrumentality meant that the notion that the *rājā* and his wives belonged to qualitatively different social spheres was made explicit.

At another level, the rituals also provided occasions for reiterating what was envisaged as the proper relationship between the sexes. For instance, in the *aśvamedha* (SB 13.2.2.4), the ewe to be sacrificed to the goddess Sarasvatī was placed beneath the horse to ensure that women followed men and were obedient to them. Similarly, the *rāṣṭrabhṛt* (offerings meant to support the *rāṣṭra*) (ibid.: 9.4.1.6–12) were made to a single male god and numerous females to convey that one man could have several wives and be endowed with prowess or virility.

Occasionally, the importance of goddesses was denied in such rituals. For instance, while the last sacrificial victim for the *vājapeya* was meant for Vāc (SB 5.1.3.11), this was transferred to Prajāpati and justified in terms of his omnipotence. Given Vāc's attributes, referred to earlier, this shift was, in a sense, arbitrary, although it was logical from the standpoint of enforcing the gender hierarchy.

While efforts were made to both conciliate and dominate categories such as the *viś* and the *brāhmaṇas* such possibilities were not envisaged for women.[27] However, unlike the *bhrātṛvya* or the

[25] In the *vājapeya* (SB 5.2.1.8), the wife was regarded as representing the lower half (*jaghanārdha*) of the sacrifice.

[26] Occasionally, wives could be replaced by daughters (e.g. SB 13.5.2.5).

[27] This was virtually identical with the position of women vis-à-vis *śraiṣṭhya*

sapatna, the resolution envisaged for gender-based conflicts was not in terms of extermination or destruction. This was probably due to the fact that while the hostility of some kinsmen could be countered by ensuring the support of others, women as a category were (and are) virtually irreplaceable.

I had suggested that attempts to conciliate social categories by according them a place within the ritual and/or by using the ritual to establish bonds between them and the *rājā* implied a recognition of their strength and importance. While the relative paucity of such references vis-à-vis women may indicate that *rājya* developed within a context of pre-existing gender stratification the very need to reiterate such an understanding through rituals points to a certain amount of tension. This is reflected in the notion of the hostility of the goddesses to those who performed the *rājasūya* (SB 5.4.3.20) and *vājapeya* (ibid.: 5.2.1.18). In both instances, the goddess identified with the earth or Aditi (e.g. SB 5.4.3.20, BSS 12.12), and the *yajamāna* or *rājā* were conceived of as mutually afraid of one another, with each suspecting that the other would injure him/her. Ultimately, a mother-son relationship was established between the two to ensure that they did not hurt one another.[28] What is also noteworthy is the equation established between Aditi and the *mahiṣī* on the one hand (SB 5.3.1.4) and the earth and the *mahiṣī* on the other (ibid.: 6.5.3.1). While this connection was not elaborated, it was probably related to the tension envisaged between Aditi or the earth and the *yajamāna* which was ritually resolved. In other instances, the *rāṣṭra* in general was conceived of as being based on the appropriation of female power. This was evident in the myth of Śrī and the *mitravindeṣṭi*, referred to earlier.

While such myths were probably symbolic of a certain amount of resistance to enforcing gender stratification through rituals, this met with only limited success. In fact, women who aspired to *rājya* or who attempted to question the new basis of *rājya* were

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and the *soma* sacrifice.

[28] It is interesting that the principal opponent to Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* in the *Mahābhārata* was thought to be Jarāsamdha, named after his foster-mother, Jarā, who was conceived of as a *rākṣasī* (Mbh 2.17.6). Jarāsamdha's hostility towards *rājās* as a class was viewed as particularly threatening.

denied legitimacy within the new ritual framework. While a similar relationship has been observed in the context of the *soma* sacrifice, the extension of these norms to the new, large-scale rituals meant that the gulf between the sexes was envisaged as both wider and virtually unbridgeable.

This relationship was reinforced in the non-sacrificial context as well, where *rājās* were often associated with possessing, giving and receiving women. For instance, Indra, as *rājā*, was conceived of as possessing numerous *janis* or women (RV 7.18.2), while Soma was described as the first husband of all women (e.g. PGS 1.4.16) and received Prajāpati's daughter Sāvitrī in marriage (AB 4.17.1), this constituting one of the ideal types of marriage. Similarly, the acts of human *rājās* which were considered worthy of note (and possibly emulation) included the giving of daughters—by Śaryāta to the sage Cyavana (SB 4.1.5.7) and by Jānaśruti Pautrāyana to Raikva (CU 4.2.5). Ultimately, this was universalized in the ideal of all women being regarded as objects, being dehumanized in the process.

Thus, the establishment of *rājya* as an institution was associated with the systematic enforcement of gender stratification. Early mythical possibilities, which envisaged divine *rājās* exercising *rājya* in a situation of relatively unstratified relations between the sexes, and the possibility of *rājñīs*, were modified or abandoned. At the same time, rituals which legitimized *rājya* were envisaged as a means of both using women, especially wives, and of establishing the control of men over women in general. While this process differentiated between the *rājā* and women as subject and object or doer and instrument, it also enabled the *rājā* to establish an identity of interests with men who were asserting unilateral control over the household. This permitted the consolidation of the power and authority of the *rājā* on a basis which was substantially different from what was envisaged for his divine counterparts.

VIII

The social role of the *rājā* was thus changing during the period under consideration. The human *rājā* was increasingly associated

with maintaining a complex, stratified social order, aligning, despite tensions and stresses, with categories which were emerging as dominant. At the same time, the very support provided by the *rājā* would have permitted such social categories to acquire greater strength.

The changing role of the *rājā* vis-à-vis social issues was epitomized in the shift from the ideal of *ṛta* to that of *dharma*. The former was typically associated with Varuṇa (Choudhuri 1981: 33) and was occasionally extended to Soma as well.[29] The all-encompassing, universalistic nature of *ṛta* (literally truth) has been frequently remarked upon (e.g. Griswold 1971: 133). *Ṛta* included the physical, moral and social order, which were ideally conceived of as integral parts of a whole. For our present purpose, the notion of the social order associated with *ṛta* is especially significant, as upholding *ṛta*, Varuṇa's characteristic function (e.g. RV 5.63.1), did not mean enforcing a differential social code. On the other hand, *ṛta* had an identical meaning for all, irrespective of social distinctions.

The universality of *ṛta* becomes evident when one considers what were regarded as its violations. These included killing (RV 1.41.8), cursing (ibid.), deception (ibid.: 2.29.5) and anger (ibid.: 7.86.6). What is remarkable is that there is no notion of the significance of the offence varying according to the social category to which the offender belonged—*ṛta* was thought to be violated if such acts were committed against any one, including brothers, friends or neighbours (ibid.: 5.85.7). In this sense, *ṛta* presents a sharp contrast to the discussion on *dharma* in the Dharma Sūtras, where the focus shifts from the offence to the social status of the offender and the victim.

The nature of *ṛta* in practice is probably exemplified by the myth of the *tānūnaptra* (AB 1.4.7), which explores the means of resolving disputes. According to the myth, the gods felt that the

[29] Other divine *rājās* such as Mitra (RV 5.63.1) and the Ādityas in general (ibid.: 2.27.4) were also associated with upholding *ṛta*. *Ṛta*, unlike *dharma*, was occasionally associated with goddesses such as Uṣas and Naktā (Dawn and Night respectively) who were described as *ṛtasya mātā*, i.e., the mothers of *ṛta* (ibid.: 1.142.7).

asuras were prospering on account of disagreements amongst the former. They held separate discussions in groups and ultimately agreed to deposit their bodies with Varuṇa *rājā* with the understanding that whoever created further dissension would not be reunited with his body. The myth thus explores the possibility of arriving at an agreement through discussions amongst equals. Violations of the agreement, moreover, led to a uniform punishment, with the *rājā* being required to ensure the implementation of a contract that had been arrived at independently.

Upholding *ṛta*, which was thus potentially egalitarian and universal, was not, however, incorporated within the social role envisaged for the human *rājā*. This is evident from the fact that the importance of maintaining *ṛta* is rarely reiterated on either the ritual or the prescriptive level, being replaced, more often than not, by the notion of *dharma*, which extended the *rājā*'s authority over the 'whole field of life' (Anjaria 1935: 234).[30]

The replacement of *ṛta* by *dharma* did not simply mean the substitution of one universalistic ideal by another because *dharma*, unlike *ṛta*, was increasingly defined in terms of *varṇa* and *āśrama*, with the *rājā* being expected to ensure that the 'order' on which these classifications were based was protected (e.g. GDS 11.9, VDS 19.7). This meant the protection of specific elements of the social order, including access to rituals and the realm of the sacred, productive resources and women.

The replacement of *ṛta* by *dharma* had important social implications. It meant that the *rājā* was no longer required to follow an identical policy towards all those with whom he was connected. To an extent, this was inevitable, given the widening of the sphere

[30] Griswold (1971: 133) observes: 'With the passing of Varuṇa in the post-Vedic period, the content of *ṛita* was taken up into that of *dharman* "law" and *karman* "retribution" . . . This change was not for the better. *Ṛita* as embodied in the will of Varuṇa was connected with a god of grace, who could pardon sin and restore the sinner to his fellowship. *Karman* on the contrary was a merely mechanical invoking of the principle of retribution.' It should be noted also that occasionally lip-service continued to be paid to the varunic ideal of kingship, as is evident from the reference to the *rājā* as *dhṛtavrata*, a typical epithet of Varuṇa, in the relatively late GDS (8.1).

of influence of the *rājā*—as more and different people were brought within the scope of *rājya*, it was difficult to adopt a universal policy towards all. As a result, the problem of securing social support and acceptance became more acute—this could be, and was resolved by exploring a number of alternative possibilities, which broadly led to a shift away from a more or less egalitarian support base to one where support was more differentiated, with a distinct relationship and/or identity with different social categories being gradually worked out.[31] - it also led to segmental law wherein each caste or community policed itself according to the "laws" of its groups. The raja became distant as did 'government' or the 'state' - Royal law was a "supreme" court or court of last resort.

[31] The nexus of power and authority which emerged is reflected in the stereotyped list of those who were eligible to receive the *madhuparka*, a mixture of curd, ghee and honey. These included the sacrificial priest, teacher, *rājā* and kinsmen belonging to different generations (e.g. AGS 1.24.2–4, GDS 5.28, BDS 2.3.6.36, VDS 11.2). The ingredients of *madhuparka* also figure amongst those recommended as the first food to be offered by the father to the new-born son (BAU 6.4.24). These ingredients were thought to have 'the property of building pure, unspoiled semen' (Carstairs, cited in O'Flaherty 1980: 52).

Chapter Six

The Rājā (III): Changing Structures of Support

He whose *rājya* is accepted by *rājas* becomes a *rājā*.
Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.

I

The *rājā* as is evident from the preceding discussion, was gradually acquiring a number of social and economic roles. While some of these were related to the expansion of his realm or sphere of influence, others were implicit in the channelling of and control over networks of exchange. In other cases, the *rājā* attempted to consolidate social support by ordering his relations with existing or emerging social categories on a new basis. All of these developments necessitated the creation of mechanisms for the fulfilment of functions which were both new and different from those associated with the *rājā* during the early Vedic phase.

The support mechanisms which were crucial included those which permitted access to economic resources, which provided the basis for developing other institutions for consolidating the power and authority of the *rājā*. Access to resources could have been direct (i.e. in the sense of the ruler being conceived of as the sole owner), or indirect, resting on an ability to claim and obtain part of the produce from other socio-economic categories. It is the latter possibility which is explored at length in terms of the occasions and justifications for appropriation. At the same time, the very appropriation of resources presupposed the existence or creation of the means to appropriate them.

A second basis of support centred around access to and control over instruments of coercion, typified by the horse-drawn chariot in particular which became symbolic power, as we shall see. While

the development of coercive mechanisms was occasionally justified in terms of protection of the people (presumably against external enemies), these mechanisms were also useful for the appropriation of resources and for dealing with internal opposition as well.

At another level, internal opposition was countered through the development of the notion of *daṇḍa*, literally the staff or the stick, through the use of which those who did not or could not control themselves, that is, those who did not conform to norms, were to be chastised (GDS 11.30). Although *daṇḍa* implied an ability to coerce others into submission, its theoretical basis was not force, but the asserted moral authority of the *rājā*. While a full-fledged judicial system did not develop during the period under consideration, the administration of *daṇḍa* was particularly useful in cementing the bond between the *rājā* and the social categories whose support was considered valuable, as it could be used to safeguard the interests of the latter.

Equally significant was the development of means of communication which were important not only for the transmission of explicit orders or commands, but also for communicating less direct, but none the less important, basic messages regarding the invulnerability or indispensability of the *rājā*. Related to this were the means of legitimization, including large-scale sacrifices such as the *rājasūya*, which served to differentiate the *rājā* from the rest of the population, and, at the same time, connected him with them.

As is obvious, these institutions did not emerge in a vacuum. In fact, the context within which they emerged contributed substantially to their distinctive features—the relative weakness of similar developments centring around the *śreṣṭha*, *adhipati* or *svarāj* points to the problems inherent in evolving such institutions. As Kurtz (1981: 181) observes in a more general context:

> The early state is an amalgam of structural oppositions. On the one hand exists the state, its functionaries, bureaucratic apparatus, central authority, and embryonic economic, religious, military, legal, educational and other support structures. On the other hand there is a subordinate population that is embedded in traditional structures and adheres to traditional values.

The support structures which emerged were very often formally similar to earlier ones, although the content was often substantially different. This attempt to straddle both worlds, as it were, led to stresses and strains. It is also likely that the effort to meet the challenge posed by the situation contributed to the development of some of these institutions.

The second contextual dimension, which I will explore in greater detail subsequently, was provided by the sharpening of social differences within the realm of the *rājā* which was itself a potentially expanding unit. As noted earlier, the *rājā* attempted to win the support of some social categories to the exclusion of others. This led to the development of what may be described as multi-functional institutions of support. While these were explicitly meant to safeguard the interests of the *rājā*, they were, at the same time, viewed as a means of ensuring contact with, and the support of, the dominant social categories.[1] In practice, such multi-functionality may not have been very easy to achieve, as the interests of the *rājā* and the dominant social categories need not have coincided very neatly in every instance. This, once again, contributed to the exploration of a range of possibilities, especially as the *rājā* was dependent on the active support and participation of at least some members of these social categories for the very functioning of such institutions.

The evidence for analysing structures of support is in itself significant. Myths pertaining to Varuṇa and Soma contain little or no information regarding such mechanisms. This is not surprizing, given the sharp divergence between the roles envisaged for the deities on the one hand and for their human counterparts in the later Vedic phase and subsequently on the other. Besides, some of the support mechanisms associated with these deities were tacitly dismantled.

If myths provide us with negative evidence, rituals, which con-

[1] These institutions were also multi-functional at another level, in the sense that the same mechanisms or structures or personnel were often employed in a range of functions, including appropriation, coercion and communication. Such a lack of specialization is fairly typical of chiefdoms, where 'officials' tend to exercise generalized rather than specialized power (Gluckman 1971: 146).

stituted an important means of communicating political messages and legitimizing the power and authority of the *rājā*, provide us with a wealth of data on the emergence of alternative structures of support. Besides, the information regarding the participants in such rituals, and the roles assigned to them, are useful. This is particularly true of the *ratnins* (e.g. SB 5.3.1.1–13) whose participation and support was essential during the *rājasūya*. Finally, incidental references enable us to corroborate, substantiate and elaborate on the data available from rituals, myths and prescriptions.

II

The importance of access to and control over material resources as a prerequisite for the development and maintenance of institutions of administration, coercion and legitimization is widely recognized (R.S. Sharma 1991: 199). However, as suggested earlier, the notion of the *rājā* as an appropriator of resources, and the centrality assigned to this in the later Vedic tradition and subsequently, marks a fundamental shift in the characterization of the *rājā*.

The later Vedic phase also witnessed the development of major rituals for legitimizing *rājya*. These incorporated two apparently contradictory goals. On the one hand, they were viewed as a means whereby the *rājā* could ensure general well- being. At the same time, these sacrifices provided the *rājā*, as an unique individual, with an occasion for legitimately acquiring produce and productive resources.

The first goal was probably valuable because it reiterated the connection and the identity of the *rājā* with his divine counterparts who (especially Soma) were associated with notions of universal prosperity. It could also be extended to suggest that the *rājā* could claim specific resources to enable him to fulfil his role as promoter of general well-being, as suggested earlier.[2]

The terms used to signify the resources or produce which were

[2] The justification of appropriation in terms of benevolence 'entails mutual obligations between rulers and citizens, and this reciprocity is a subtle aspect of the socialization process by which the allegiance of the citizen is shifted to the state' (Kurtz 1981: 193).

appropriated or transferred are in themselves significant. These included *bali*, which was amongst the earliest of such terms, *ātithya* or hospitality and *bhāga* or share. The first term, as noted earlier, had a religious connotation, suggesting a propitiatory offering to a god or a powerful man, placing the recipient under an implicit obligation to protect or support the donor.[3]

While *bali*, thus defined, was evidently a more or less voluntary gift, there are indications that its significance was gradually changing. This is evident from the statement (SB 1.3.2.15) that the *vaiśya* offers *bali* as he is under the *vaśa* or control of the *kṣatriya* and has to give up whatever he has stored when asked to do so. The ability to demand and receive *bali*, moreover, was explicitly correlated with the *vīrya* or valour of the *kṣatriya*. This suggests an involuntary offering made under threat of coercion.[4] Thus, although the term was retained, its semantic content was substantially altered. At the same time, the use of a familiar term probably disguised the nature of the transformation and permitted the giving and receiving of *bali* in a transitional situation.

While the components of *bali* are rarely discussed, it is likely that these included agricultural produce or cattle (Ghoshal 1972: 14),[5] as those who were expected to offer *bali* were the *viś* or the *vaiśya* (SB 1.3.2.15, ApSS 16.32.4), that is, the primary producers, who, if coaxed or coerced, could yield a share of their produce. The proportion of *bali* to the total produce is nowhere specified, and it is possible that the amount exacted varied according to the relative strength or weakness of those involved in the transaction, as suggested earlier.

[3] As Gunawardana (1981: 138) observes: 'Later on these oblations (i.e. *bali*) may have become regular and obligatory, but it is important that they represented a personal relationship between the ruler and the ruled.'

[4] This is also apparent from the analogy equating the *rājā* and the *prajā* with the eater and food respectively.

[5] It is likely that such produce was converted into more valuable prestige goods such as gold objects, including *niṣkas*. There is, however, no direct evidence regarding the processes involved in the transformation of some resources into others. Alternatively, *niṣkas* may have been a part of prestige goods exchanged between rulers and priests, and may not have figured in the transaction with other members of the community.

The occasions on which *bali* was demanded, given and received are indicated in an elaborate analogy (ApSS 16.32.4) which suggests that the *viś* offered *bali* to the *rājā* during rituals which marked the latter's rebirth. These included the *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha* and *vājapeya*, which provided the context for a variety of material exchanges, as noted earlier.[6]

The intrinsic link between *bali* and the ritual context legitimized the exactions which characterized it. At the same time, it is indicative of certain problems inherent in the giving and receiving of *bali*. While ritual occasions could be used to justify exactions, the very context may have made it difficult for the *rājā* to press his claims beyond a point, as any excessive demand would have been perceived not only as oppressive, but also as violating established sacred norms or conventions.

At another level, there were limits to utilizing the sacrificial context for the mobilization and appropriation of resources. The performance of the sacrifice in itself would probably have required a range of resources. After all, prestations would probably have flowed in only if the *rājā* could perform the ritual on a scale which was impressive enough to justify demands. Besides, with increasing social complexity, and with a widening sphere of operation, it may have become more difficult for the *rājā* to ensure the presence and participation of the entire populace of the realm on such occasions. Hence, the appropriation of resources through rituals may have become more difficult.

While claims to *bali* were never explicitly abandoned other means of appropriating resources were devised. Amongst these, *ātithya* or hospitality was evidently well-known, as is suggested by references to it in analogies. Such hospitality may have included the slaughter or gift of animals (AB 1.3.4, ADS 2.4.8.7) and the offering of food or drink (SB 3.3.4.31). In other words, while the resources acquired through *bali* may have been relatively imperishable, those acquired through *ātithya* were of only immediate value.

[6] This is corroborated by the description of Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* in the *Mahābhārata* where the gifts which are 'voluntarily' brought by those attending the sacrifice are characterized as *bali* (ibid.: 2.47.5, etc.).

Nevertheless, the importance of *ātithya* was undeniable. This is evident from the repeated prescriptions regarding the offering of hospitality in general, and the prestigious *madhuparka* and *arghya*[7] in particular to the *rājā* (e.g. AGS 1.24.3, PGS 1.3.1, 2, ADS 2.4.6.36, BDS 2.3.6.36, GDS 5.31). It is likely that this provided the *rājā* with direct access to the produce of the household and was a means of support which could be tapped whenever required. Besides, it enabled the *rājā* to establish direct links with male householders in particular, this in turn providing an important means of legitimizing the position of the *rājā*.

The third form of appropriation was the *bhāga* or share, often viewed as payment in lieu of protection. One of its advantages was that it could be given and received in a non- ritual context. Thus, the basis and occasions of appropriation could be widened almost infinitely (GDS 10.24–35).[8] More commonly, *bhāga* was described as a sixth or *ṣaḍbhāga* of the produce (e.g. BDS 1.10.18.1, VDS 1.42) payable to the *rājā* for the protection he was expected to offer his subjects.

Each of the forms of appropriation required fairly distinct support mechanisms. In the case of *bali*, priestly support was particularly important in order to create the ritual context which both provided an occasion for its exaction and justified it. *Ātithya*, on the other hand, was linked to the personal presence of the *rājā* (or possibly his followers) in the household and could be successfully exacted only through extensive travelling. Finally, the collection of *bhāga* implied the development of a fairly complex administrative machinery for assessing both the total produce and the share due to the *rājā* and appropriating a wide range of goods and services.[9]

[7] *Madhuparka* was an offering of honey and milk, while *arghya* was the water offered at the respectful reception of a guest (SED: s.v.).

[8] According to Gunawardana (1981: 146): 'These new exactions . . . represent a depersonalization or formalization of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled.'

[9] While the beginnings of the latter process will be traced below, its full development falls outside our purview. That details of such machinery are not discussed within the brahmanical tradition also points to a certain secularization in this sphere towards the very end of the period under consideration.

In social terms the development of such relationships, apart from involving a basic dependence of the *rājā* on producing groups, required the support of priests on the one hand, and personnel capable of ensuring hospitality or the collection of a *bhāga* on the other.

The support of priests was particularly valuable for justifying the development of appropriative relations in general. This was attempted, and possibly achieved, through a variety of rituals. These ranged from those in which the *rājā* participated directly, such as the *rājasūya* (SB 5.3.3.12) during which the priest was supposed to render everything (and everybody) except the *brāhmaṇas* into food for the *rājā/yajamāna*, to domestic rituals, where the participation of the *rājā* was at best analogical. An example of the latter is provided by the fortnightly new and full moon sacrifice (ibid.: 1.3.2.15) where an offering was recommended to ensure that the *prajā* and the ruler or *kṣatriya* remained united to one another as food, *ādya* (literally that which deserves to be eaten) and *attṛ* or eater respectively. This meant that the message of the *rājasūya* was now no longer restricted to a major ritual occasion but could be potentially communicated more consistently to a larger audience. It is also likely that the particular understanding of the *rājā- prajā* relation which was sanctified and legitimized was used to justify not only *bali* but virtually any exaction the *rājā* may have thought fit to impose.

As we have seen, although the services of the priests were rewarded through *dakṣiṇā* and *dāna*, there may have been some problems regarding the exact sharing of resources. Hence, almost simultaneously, means to ensure appropriation through the support of other personnel were explored. These included the *sūta* and *grāmaṇī* who, amongst others, were described as waiting for the return of the *rājā* with *anna* and *pāna* (food and drink, BAU 4.3.37).

The means whereby such personnel acquired the resources in question are not explicitly discussed. However, both the *sūta* and the *grāmaṇī* were associated with the chariot (e.g. SB 8.6.1.16–20), while their sons were expected to guard the sacrificial horse for the *aśvamedha* during its wanderings (ibid.: 13.4.2.5, SSS 16.1.16).

The ability to use force to secure prestations which were probably less forthcoming on a voluntary basis may have acquired greater importance during the period under consideration. Besides, the use of the chariot probably permitted the collection of tribute on a more systematic basis. Hence, the chariot was regarded as a means of obtaining wealth in the context of the *vājapeya* (SB 5.1.4.3).

In addition, the *grāmaṇī* owed his significance to direct control over produce and productive resources, being identified as a *vaiśya* (SB 5.3.1.6) and equated with plenitude (*bhūmā*, ibid.). *Śrī* or prosperity, identified with *anna* and *paśu* was regarded as an essential characteristic of *grāmaṇya* (ibid.: 8.6.1.12). More commonly, the *grāmaṇī* was regarded as one of the typical examples of a *gataśrī*, a man who had attained prosperity (BSS 17.49, SSS 2.6.5).[10] In other words, while the support of the priests was important for legitimizing claims to produce, the actual acquisition of resources in both the ritual and the non-ritual context probably depended on the material and military support provided by the *sūta* and *grāmaṇī*. Hence, it is not surprizing that they were described as *arājanaḥ rājakartṛs*, non-*rājās* who were *rājā*-makers (SB 3.4.1.7).

The intimate ties which bound the *rājā* to such men are evident from the analogy between the *sūta* and the *grāmaṇī* and the *rājā* on the one hand, and the metres and Soma on the other (SB 3.4.1.8), indicating that just as the *sūta* and the *grāmaṇī* receive food after or along with the *rājā*, and not separately, so also the offering to the metres should be made after or along with the offering to Soma. In other words, while the *sūta* and the *grāmaṇī* may have ensured access to hospitality (amongst other things) for the *rājā*, they were rewarded with a share in both the prestige and the resources which were explicitly conferred on such occasions.

[10] The *grāmṇī*'s association with prosperity is also referred to in Buddhist literature (Ghoshal 1966a: 35). According to U. Chakravarti (1987: 85), 'the *gāmaṇī* represented the 'political' wing of the *gahapati* category'. The *gāmaṇī* was evidently knowledgeable as far as agricultural practices were concerned, exercised certain judicial functions and acted as the official head of the village, providing a connection between the average householder, the *gahapati* and extra-village sources of power and authority (ibid.).

At another level, the *rājā* probably ensured the support of such categories and consolidated his control over resources by gradually marginalizing those who were associated with alternative, possibly earlier systems of distribution. These included the *bhāgadugha* and *akṣāvāpa*. While they are referred to as *ratnins* (e.g. SB 5.3.1.9–10), their position towards the end of the list[11] indicates that they were relatively unimportant. This is also corroborated by the virtual absence of references to them in later prescriptive literature.

The *bhāgadugha* was in all likelihood a distributor of shares (R.S. Sharma 1991: 361) which probably included the spoils of battle, cattle, cereals, etc. (Law 1960: 90, Ghoshal 1966a: 35, R.S. Sharma 1983a: 76, 1984: 11). The relatively low position assigned to him probably indicates the declining importance of generalized redistribution as a function associated with the *rājā*.[12]

Like the *bhāgadugha*, the *akṣāvāpa* in charge of dicing, was also associated with mechanisms of exchange which were being marginalized. The ritualization of dicing involved, as we have seen, a distortion of its original nature. Thus, the very rituals which legitimized *rājya* provided for an implicit hierarchy amongst systems of exchange, reinforcing those which permitted the concentration of resources in the hands of the *rājā* and possibly his supporters, while virtually abandoning processes which would have permitted a more equitable distribution.[13]

Thus, the *rājā* attempted to broaden his control over productive resources. This is evident in the efforts to acquire such resources

[11] See Table II for details.

[12] The fact that lip-service continued to be paid to the *bhāgadugha* was probably due to the difficulties inherent in rejecting traditional practices and systems outright.

[13] Towards the very end of the period under consideration, the *rājā* was expected to intervene in and control other forms of exchange which were acquiring importance, to check weights and measures (VDS 19.15), thus providing safeguards for traders. Besides, *dravyavṛddhi* (literally the growth of objects or wealth) or interest was thought to stop on his death, resuming growth only after the installation of a new *rājā* (ibid.: 2.49, 50). Implicit is an assumption that the existence of the *rājā* was essential for money-lending. In other words, the *rājā* gradually acquired responsibility for a very different kind of exchange system.

Buddhist thought placed the rājā at the "hub" of the wheel - holding the "spoke" together

on a number of occasions, both ritual and non-ritual. This in turn necessitated the development of support structures and ties with a range of personnel, including priests and the *sūta* and *grāmaṇī*. Some of the resources acquired were shared with such personnel in the form of gifts or hospitality. Besides, their support may have been ensured through the pursuit of policies which permitted them to consolidate resources on an individual basis. In other words, the very process whereby the *rājā* acquired access to resources was both conditioned by and in turn influenced the contemporary socio-economic situation.

III

Access to produce or productive resources was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the emergence of *rājya*. In fact, control over material resources depended on the ability to develop appropriative mechanisms including instruments of coercion. Physical force was not typical of either of the divine *rājās*. While both were associated with *kṣatra*, this did not initially include notions of coercive ability or physical prowess. Varuṇa's typical weapon, in contrast to Indra's *vajra*, was the noose or *pāśa* which would have been particularly useless on the battle-field or in situations of armed conflict.

Soma, likewise, was conceived of as a relatively passive deity; he was constantly described as being brought from heaven, both in early Vedic myths (Deshmukh 1933: 281) and in the later Vedic tradition (e.g. PVB 6.9.22), his own role in the process being one of marginal importance. Another myth (AB 1.5.4) refers to Soma's dependence on Agni for protection against the *asuras* and *rakṣas*. The absence of an emphasis on prowess as an attribute of the divine *rājās* may indicate that while the early Vedic *rājā* could occasionally demonstrate his skills in warfare, these were not considered intrinsic to the definition of *rājya*.[14]

[14] Even in the later brahmanical tradition, when warfare was regarded as one of the typical functions of the *rājā*, he was expected to fight according to norms (e.g. BDS 1.10.18.11).

In the later Vedic context, however, the *rājā* was more systematically associated with notions of coercion. This was legitimized through rituals which sanctified the *rājā*'s claims to the productive resources of the *viś*, to destroy or eliminate his *bhrātṛvya* or *sapatna* and to assert the dominance of all men over women. As opposed to this, the notion of the *rājā* as a defender against external enemies is relatively less developed.

The notion of the valiant *rājā* was positively valorized in the *aśvamedha* where the *rājanya* lute-player was expected to extol the *rājā*'s success in battle everyday throughout the period when the sacrificial horse was let loose to wander (e.g. SB 13.1.5.6). This emphasis on perpetuating and possibly elaborating the memory of military victories meant that the *rājā*'s claim to *rājya* was being asserted, partly at least, on the basis of his military prowess. What is more, this was standardized in later definitions of *rājya* (e.g. GDS 10.12, BDS 1.10.18.3, VDS 2.17) where the *rājā* was routinely expected to ensure victory and learn the use of the chariot and the bow and arrow (GDS 10.14).

Although the *rājā*'s victories were often depicted as individual triumphs, these rested on the active support of at least some people. Here, once again, there is a fairly marked difference between the situation described in myths and that evident in rituals and prescriptions.

On the mythical plane, the Maruts, equated with the *viś*, were conceived of as agents in Indra's victory over Vṛtra (e.g. SB 2.5.3.3). Similarly, the Viśvedevas, also identified with the *viś*, were thought to ward off the *asuras* and *rākṣasas* who attacked the *soma* sacrifice (e.g. AB 6.27.1). While this suggests the active participation of the *viś* in such conflicts, this was not developed further in the later Vedic tradition and subsequently. Thus, it is likely that the *viś* was losing control or being deprived of its military function. This was probably related to the changing *rājā-viś* relationship which was becoming more exploitative. In this situation, the *viś* were probably less reliable as allies. Besides, the very need to control the *viś* in order to enforce the new *rājā-viś* relationship meant that different systems of coercion were required. Hence it is not surprising that the *rājā* was turning to other personnel for support, typified by the

growing importance of the *senānī*, literally the leader of the *senā* or army, who was included amongst the *ratnins* (SB 5.3.1.1) and associated with Agñi Anīkavat (literally Agni endowed with an army) in the same context.

The *senānī*'s links with the chariot were, moreover, consistently emphasized, reflected in the names assigned to typical *senānīs* (SB 8.6.1.16–20), including Rathagṛtsa (skilled in chariot (fight), Eggeling 1963d: 105), Rathasvana (chariot-noise, ibid.: 106), Rathaprota (fixed on the chariot, ibid.: 106), Tārkṣya (a mythical being, originally identified as a horse and later taken to be a bird, SED: s.v.) and Senājit or the winner of armies (Eggeling 1963d: 108). Of the five names, three were directly and one (Tārkṣya) indirectly associated with the chariot. It is possible that this emphasis on the non-human means of warfare was related to the tensions inherent in the attempt to transform the *viś*-dominated *senā* into a body which would be effective not only against external enemies, but against the *viś* as well. The emphasis on the chariot is also evident in the case of other personnel associated with the later Vedic *rājā* including the *grāmaṇī* and *sūta*[15] and *samgrahitṛ*, the last named being associated with the chariot in the *rājasūya* (SB 5.3.1.8), all of whom were included in the list of *ratnins* (e.g. SB 5.3.1.5.ff).

The new military leaders were obviously important because of their association with the chariot, which evidently distinguished them from the common populace. The ability to own and maintain such a vehicle in itself implied access to productive resources over and above immediate requirements and an ability to convert such access into a mechanism of coercion. In its turn, the chariot constituted not only a symbol of power, but a means of swift transport and attack, and hence was a means of obtaining wealth (SB 5.1.4.3). Thus, those members of the *viś* who could acquire chariots could then use these to acquire more wealth and on a different basis (i.e. not through direct production) and thus differentiate themselves from other members of the *viś*.[16] At the same time, they would have

[15] The association between the *sūta* and the chariot is reiterated in the epics as well, being typified by the role of Sumantra in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

[16] The *sūta*'s position was somewhat different from that of the other personnel, as he owed his importance more to the fact that he drove the chariot of the

been able to provide the *rājā* with support on a basis which was considerably different from that of the *viś* as typified by homogeneous categories such as the Maruts and the Viśvedevas. Hence, it is not surprizing that the *rājā* attempted to win them over, acknowledging their strength, and, at the same time, using them to bolster his position, ostensibly vis-à-vis external enemies, but effectively vis-à-vis his own people as well.

The use envisaged for the coercive network which was thus developing is in itself significant. Virtually all the personnel referred to above, and/or their kinsmen, were expected to guard the *aśvamedha* horse during its wanderings (e.g. SB 13.4.2.5, SSS 16.1.16, ApSS 20.4.4). While this may have been a means of spreading sacred power and fertility throughout the realm (Gonda 1969: 114) it was, at the same time, an occasion for appropriating wealth. At another level, the legitimacy of acquiring wealth through warfare was recognized almost throughout the brahmanical tradition (e.g. RV 10.101.7, GDS 10.19). In other words, coercion was viewed as a means of enforcing appropriative relationships in a rather direct fashion.

The means whereby the *sūta* and *grāmaṇī* were rewarded have been referred to earlier. It is likely that the *samgrahitṛ* was rewarded with a share of the spoils of the battle (AB 2.9.1). Thus, while regular salaries were unknown, and the system of rewards continued, these now served to bind together a relatively smaller group of men who were united not only against other similar groups, but against the larger populace of their own realms as well.

IV

The use of force, threatened or actual, was only one of a range of means which was developed to establish or enforce the rule of the *rājā*. As has been frequently observed, overt coercion which may be the ultimate weapon for upholding power, is, in practice, supplemented by other institutions, which are often adequate to maintain relationships of dominance in most situations. Hence, the

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rājā than to direct ownership of a chariot.

day-to-day use of coercion is rare. Amongst non-coercive institutions, those concerned with the administration of what is defined as justice are often crucial. Here I will argue that the development of the notion of *daṇḍa*, apart from symbolizing a function or a role expected of the *rājā*, was important in justifying or legitimizing the control exerted by him. In other words, the perpetuation of the ideal of the just *rājā* ensured social support, and meant that recourse to force may have been less necessary in concrete situations.

The appropriation of the task of administering *daṇḍa* was one means whereby the *rājā* continued to maintain his identity and connection with the early ideal of *rājya*, typified by Varuṇa in particular. He was conceived of as endowed with omniscience, being able to see both good and evil, as well as things which were near or far, and the past and the future (RV 2.27.3, 1.25.11). Besides, his *spaś* or spies (ibid.: 7.61.3) were expected to assist him in the task.

Varuṇa's weapon of punishment was, however, not the *daṇḍa* but the *pāśa* or noose, which characterized him almost throughout the brahmanical tradition (Gajendragadkar 1965: 40). The unique feature of the *pāśa* was that the impact of its use, unlike that of the *daṇḍa* was reversible—it could be used to bind, but could be removed in order to release the offender as well. Hence, prayers were offered to Varuṇa to remove sins and protect the invoker (RV 2.28.9).

The means whereby Varuṇa was expected to punish offenders included diseases in general and dropsy in particular (Deshmukh 1933: 217). This was in a sense logical, because if Varuṇa presided over a holistic order, violations which meant creating disorder could be punished through the creation of disorders at another, related level. In other words, social conflicts and differences could be contained through the threat of imminent disease.

However, in practice, disease may not have always struck those who were regarded as offenders. While such discrepancies may not have been particularly acute in a situation where social differences were not too sharp, and hostility or tension relatively muted, they may have become more glaring in the complex socio-political situation I have outlined earlier, and which provided the context within

which the *rājā* consolidated his position. Here, offences were no longer viewed in intrinsic terms, but were increasingly assessed in terms of the social categories to which the offender and the victim belonged. Moreover, such social categories were not equivalent. In this situation, the weight of offences was hierarchically ordered, and the *rājā* who depended on the support of the dominant social categories, necessarily tended to accept and develop a definition of justice which was considerably different from the earlier one. Besides, less was left to chance attacks of illness. Thus, the human *rājā*'s identity with Varuṇa continued to be reiterated. For instance, in the *rājasūya* (SB 5.4.4.5), the *rājā* who mounted the throne was declared to be *dhṛtavrata* and equal to Varuṇa *rājā*. The choice of the epithet emphasized stability and the maintenance of norms and customs (Gonda 1959: 113). At the same time, efforts were made to both define the sphere within which the *rājā* was expected to operate, and the means at his disposal more closely. In both respects, there was a shift from the universalistic Varunic possibilities.

The attempt to define the sphere of the *rājā* is reflected in the composition or compilation of norms in the Dharma Sūtras. The issues focused on, as well as the resolutions envisaged, were, as noted before, related to specific elements of the *varṇa* and gender hierarchy. While the extent to which specific *rājās* intervened in such issues probably varied according to circumstances, the potential ability to enforce norms made the *rājā* appear as both powerful and indispensable. Secondly, it probably provided a mechanism for penetrating within existing or emerging social relationships, and of widening the scope of *rājya*.

Related to this was the question of defining *dharma*. Not surprizingly, a similar question was not posed vis-à-vis *ṛta*, which was conceived of as a natural pre-existing order. As we have seen, *brāhmaṇas* claimed a virtual monopoly over the right to define *dharma*. Besides, virtually all the Dharma Sūtras (e.g. GDS 12.52) contain detailed descriptions of the *brāhmaṇa* members of the *rājā*'s *pariṣad* who were assigned or claimed a central role in both defining and codifying norms and in enforcing them, especially through the prescription of a range of penances, which often substituted for punishments.

* Vedic or "Varunic" rājā → dharmic (ṛta) rājā.

At the same time, the *rājā*, unlike Varuṇa (who was intrinsically qualified), was expected to possess a number of qualifications for administering *daṇḍa*. Typically, it was suggested that he ought to be good in words and deeds, with knowledge of both logic and other branches of learning, endowed with adequate resources, impartial towards his *prajā*, and he was expected to inflict lawful punishment (GDS 11.2). The emphasis on impartiality or *nyāya-daṇḍatva* (e.g. GDS 10.8) was however superficial, as it meant in practice the enforcement of a norm which varied according to *varṇa*, *āśrama* and gender.

The need to administer *daṇḍa* was constantly reiterated. This was described as a means whereby the *rājā* could attain both this world and the next (ADS 2.5.11.4). Besides, the *rājā* who did not punish offenders was considered both guilty and polluting (ADS 2.11.28.13, GDS 18.36, VDS 19.40, BDS 1.10.19.10).[17]

At another level, the emphasis on the symbolism of *daṇḍa*, as opposed to the *pāśa*, meant that the punishment administered by the *rājā* acquired an irrevocable, final character. In other words, each instance of the administration of punishment reinforced the definition of power which was emerging, presenting it as unchallengeable or irreversible.[18]

Despite the emphasis on *daṇḍa*, the enforcement mechanism available to the *rājā* was rather weak. Varuṇa's *spaś* are rarely heard of subsequently. Thus, the functionaries associated with the enforcement of *ṛta* were marginalized, probably sharing a fate somewhat similar to that of the *akṣāvāpa* and *bhāgadugha*.

If the earlier mechanisms were considered less effective for enforcing the new order, the development of new ones was also not

[17] As an extension of this, those who were killed by *rājakrodha* or the anger of the *rājā* were thought to be purified immediately, along with their kinsfolk (GDS 14.10). The implication was that the *rājā* by his act of violence actually restored the social and moral order which had been disrupted by the crime or sin.

[18] *Daṇḍa* may have also been symbolic of the axis uniting the divine and earthly worlds (Gonda 1965: 265). Such an identification would have been useful in assigning its use a sacrosanct character.

very easy. This is suggested by the constant prescription that a thief ought to run to the *rājā*, confess his sin/crime and beg for pardon (e.g. ADS 1.9.25.4, GDS 12.40–41, BDS 2.1.1.15, 16, VDS 19.38). This dependence for enforcing rules on the very people who were guilty of violating them may have been rather ineffective in practice.

In such a situation, it is not surprizing that punishments were frequently substituted by penances, which could be prescribed by the *ācārya* or *purohita*, the teacher and the priest respectively (ADS 2.5.10.14). Such penances were relatively simple, including *japa* or the recitation of sacred texts or names, *tapas* or austerity, *homa* or offerings, *upavāsa* or fasting and *dāna* or the giving of gifts (GDS 19.12).

As is evident from the treatment of theft and the prescription of penances, *daṇḍa* was, in fact, frequently supplemented by the right to pardon sinners, which was claimed, or accorded to, the *rājā*, *snātaka*, *ācārya* and *ṛtvij* (ADS 2.10.27.21). This was probably an important means of extending the influence of both the *rājā* and *brāhmaṇas*, who could be considered nearly Varuṇa-like in power and status. The *rājā* who could punish as well as pardon would be almost divine and hence inviolable.

It is evident that while the assertion of an ability to administer *daṇḍa* was important in legitimizing the position of the *rājā* and winning social support, its development was by no means easy. Part of the problem may have stemmed from the constraint on resources; other problems were posed by the earlier, powerful association with Varuṇa, which could not be explicitly or totally ignored or bypassed. In this situation, although the *rājā* theoretically claimed a position analogous to Varuṇa's, the policies he was expected to adopt were markedly different. Besides, he lacked the ability to carry the administration of *daṇḍa* to its logical conclusion, reflected in the discrepancies between the potential and actual scope of *daṇḍa*, and the weak instruments of enforcement. It is also apparent in the dependence on priestly support for both defining and enforcing norms.

Nevertheless, the importance of the rudimentary judicial system which was emerging needs to be underscored. It was a means of

cementing ties with the dominant social categories. Besides, it permitted the consolidation and intensification of the power of the *rājā* by potentially granting him access to virtually every sphere of human activity. At another level, the association developed between the *rājā* and this sphere, typified by analogies with Varuṇa, strengthened the *rājā*'s claims to sacrality and thus legitimized his position.

V

The supportive mechanisms outlined presupposed the development of means of communications. These were necessary for the consolidation of the power of the *rājā* on at least two levels—one between the *rājā* and those who constituted his core support group, including the priesthood, the *sūta*, *grāmaṇī*, *kṣattṛ* and *samgrahitṛ*, and a second between the *rājā* and the *viś* or *prajā*. In the first instance, the very development of the structures of support referred to earlier would have engendered a certain closeness between the *rājā* and such personnel. Moreover, the ties with them were recognized through the *ratnīnāmhavīṃśi* and *aśvamedha*.

The second level of communication was, in a sense, of fundamental importance. The urgency to communicate at this level was related primarily to the need to ensure a particular kinship structure in order to generate and control the resources necessary for the maintenance of the state (Gailey 1987: x). Related to this, it was also an important means of spreading the 'web of control' (Kurtz 1981: 189) through asserting the importance and invulnerability of those who aspired to dominance. The necessity of communication was particularly important in this domain, as resorting to means of physical coercion was (and is) virtually impossible as a sustained policy.

Given the need to reach out to members of an increasingly differentiated social order, a range of means of communication was developed. In some cases, certain possibilities were gradually abandoned or marginalized, and were replaced by others. In other instances, efforts were made to intervene in and divert existing means of communication to ensure that these flowed from and to

the *rājā* and the personnel who supported him. The personnel involved in the process of communication were also fairly varied.

To start with, there was a certain emphasis on developing physical means of communication, epitomized by the chariot, which was important both for sending messages and commands and for collecting resources. Not surprizingly, the *sūta* and *grāmaṇī* were particularly important in this respect.

The importance of the *sūta* in particular was recognized almost throughout the brahmanical tradition. While this may have stemmed in part from his mobility, typified by his association with the chariot, it was also related to his knowledge of the oral tradition. In fact, the *sūta* was probably the perpetuator of a 'worldy, aristocratic, ideological, and semi-historical tradition' (Ruben 1966: 320) and was a court minstrel or chronicler (Eggeling 1963c: 60, Ghoshal 1966a: 35). In a situation where writing or literacy may have had only limited relevance, the *sūta*'s ability to communicate orally was evidently valuable.

The exact content of the *sūta*'s lore is not explicitly recorded. However, as *sūtas* are credited with the narration of the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas in later tradition, it is likely that this consisted amongst other things, of stories, possibly eulogistic, about *rājās*, and was probably couched in fairly simple language. Thus, the message communicated by the *sūtas* familiarized people with the exploits of *rājās*, providing for a selected and controlled flow of information, stressing what were regarded as desirable or ideal attributes for rulers. The message was rendered even more effective through the use of an aesthetic presentation. In other words, the pleasure of listening to the *sūta* facilitated the communication of notions regarding *rājya*.

Socially, the *sūta* was regarded as a member of the *viś* (BSS 18.2). As such, his ability to communicate probably rested on his close links with the people. However, in the later brahmanical tradition, the status assigned to him was low—he was regarded as the product of a hypergamous union between a *brāhmaṇa* woman and *kṣatriya* man (GDS 4.17, 18, BDS 1.9.17.8). At the same time, the *sūta* continued to be equated with seers on account of his knowledge of traditional lore (Gupta 1961: 35). It is likely that the

attempt to attribute a low status to the *sūta* was part of the effort of *brāhmaṇas* to monopolize the most important channels or forms of communication. Ultimately, a compromise was worked out providing for the incorporation of the lore of the *sūta* within the brahmanical tradition in the standardized versions of the epics and Purāṇas, while the transmission and preservation of the lore was increasingly taken over by the *brāhmaṇas*. What is noteworthy is that although control over the medium itself may have been wrested from the *sūta*, it continued to be used for the propagation of the norms and values associated with *rājya*.[19]

At the same time, other channels of communication were marginalized. These included those associated with the *pālāgala*, probably a courier (Eggeling 1963c: 64, R.S. Sharma 1980: 55). Although he was recognized amongst the *ratnins* (e.g. SB 5.3.1.11), he was regarded as a *śūdra* whose presence in the sacrifice had to be expiated (ibid.: 5.3.2.2). The kinds of messages communicated by the *pālāgala* are nowhere discussed, and there are virtually no references to him in later sources. It is likely that he communicated with one of the groups which was being absorbed within the scope of *rājya*. His importance was probably recognized in a transitional situation to facilitate the incorporation of such groups, but, at a later stage, following the consolidation of the *rājā*'s position, the *pālāgala*, never very important, as is evident from his inclusion towards the very end of the list of *ratnins*, was ignored completely.

The most important system of communication developed was probably through the priesthood, which could operate within virtually every household of men belonging to the first three *varṇas* (and probably elsewhere as well). We have seen how links between the *purohita* and the *rājā* had been forged, despite tensions and stresses.[20] Once developed, this provided the basis for communicating a range of important political messages at a variety of levels.

[19] At another level, the subject matter of the *sūta*'s lore was substantially enlarged. For instance, the epics and Purāṇas were used to convey the new doctrines associated with Vaiṣṇavism, and to a lesser extent, Śaivism.

[20] The institution of *paurohitya* itself may have developed during the period under consideration. This is evident from the paucity of references to the *purohita* in the early Vedic tradition (Basu 1925: 34).

The presence of the *purohita* in particular and other *brāhmaṇas* in general was regarded as essential for the performance of rituals by the *rājā*. These included large-scale sacrifices such as the *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha* and *vājapeya*, which were occasions for communicating messages regarding the ideal ordering of social relations within the realm.[21]

The *aśvamedha*, for instance, communicated important messages at a number of levels. The very wandering or journey of the sacrificial horse, accompanied by an entourage consisting of *sūtas*, *grāmaṇīs*, sons of *kṣattṛs* and *samgrahitṛs* and *rājaputras* (SB 13.4.2.5. SSS 16.1.16, ApSS 20.4.3) communicated a powerful message regarding the might of the *rājā* who was able to mobilize support and aspire to perform the elaborate sacrifice. This would have operated on at least two levels—the sight of the horse and its guards probably inspired awe in the minds of commoners. At the same time, the horse symbolized an explicit challenge to more powerful men who may have attempted to become *rājās* or were *rājās* themselves. The sacrifice itself provided an occasion for spectacular displays, both aural and visual, and would have conveyed a notion of the power of both the *yajamāna* and the priest.

At another level, the venue of the sacrifice witnessed the compilation and dissemination of a wide range of traditional lore. Its communication was now taken over by *brāhmaṇas*, operating within the context of a ritual which was intimately connected with the *rājā*. As a result, earlier, and possibly independent, traditions were now centralized and probably homogenized by the *rājā* and his supporters.[22]

The same occasion was also used to extol the achievements of the *rājā* through the songs of the *vīnāgāthins* or lute-players, a *brāhmaṇa* and *rājanya* or a *kṣatriya*, who were expected to sing every day while the horse was away. While the theme of the songs of the

[21] Such rituals consolidated: 'the values of the community, reminding individuals of shared purposes and representing, in simple dramatic form, the essentials of social and religious relationships' (Drekmeier 1962: 27).

[22] As Kurtz (1981: 186) observes: 'Rulers of inchoate states have to reduce religious heterogeneity and procure their own validating ideologies for the values which they are trying to inculcate in the polity'.

brāhmaṇa centred around the generosity of and the sacrifices performed by the *rājā*, those of the *kṣatriya* narrated his victories in battle (e.g. SB 13.1.5.6, BSS 15.8, 9, ApSS 20.6.5, 14). Thus, all those who attended the sacrifice not only heard their traditional lore, probably retold with suitable modifications, but also learnt about the *rājā*'s exploits. The ritualized transmission of information meant that dialogues, discussions and questions could be avoided. In other words, such information could not be immediately or explicitly challenged, the very context lending it an aura of sanctity. At another level, the kinds of themes chosen and the way in which the narratives were developed in concrete situations probably permitted the *brāhmaṇa* and the *rājanya* to exercise a certain pressure on the *rājā* to conform to the norms and ideals which were focused on.

Besides, in rituals such as the *rājasūya* (SB 5.4.2.3), *aindra-mahābhiṣeka* (AB 8.39.3) and *aśvamedha* (e.g. ApSS 20.4.3), the *rājā* or *yajamāna* was proclaimed as such by the priests. While it is frequently indicated that only a successful or powerful *rājā* could perform such sacrifices, the success or power of the *rājā* was explicitly recognized through the ritual, and the priests, who increasingly took over the task of according recognition, clearly played a crucial role in announcing the status of the *rājā*.

And yet, as mentioned earlier, it may have become difficult to ensure the participation of the entire populace on such occasions, and in the absence of participation, any messages communicated through these rituals would have reached a relatively limited audience.

As such, there appears to have been a search for alternative channels of communication, reflected in the attempt to ensure the presence of *brāhmaṇas* within the household.[23] For instance, there was an insistence on inviting *brāhmaṇas* for the *śrāddha* or funeral ceremony (e.g. GDS 15.9, VDS 11.29), which in the case of the

[23] While the need to communicate political messages may not provide the sole explanation for the attempt to brahmanize the practices associated with the household, the process of brahmanization proved extremely valuable for the communication of such messages.

gṛhapati marked the formal termination of control exercised by the deceased and the takeover by his successor(s).

At another level, there was an attempt to ensure daily contact with *brāhmaṇas* through the institution of the *pañcamahāyajñas*, the five great sacrifices (which, despite their name, did not involve elaborate rituals), in the course of which *brāhmaṇas* were to be accorded hospitality (e.g. AGS 1.1.2, PGS 2.9.11, BDS 2.6.11.5, VDS 11.5). While such occasions were not explicitly specified as significant for the communication of messages, it is likely that they were used for the purpose.

The evidence regarding the development of ritual alternatives is more explicit. These involved, on the one hand, the scaling down of sacrifices. Rituals such as the fortnightly new and full moon sacrifice for instance, could be performed either as an elaborate *śrauta* ritual with a full retinue of priests and the entire range of sacrificial fires, or as a relatively simple *gṛhya* or domestic sacrifice, where the presence of a priest was optional. What is significant is that the values communicated and sanctified through both levels of the ritual were more or less similar. For instance, the domestic version included the *rāṣṭrabhṛt* offerings (e.g. ApGS 2.7), literally meant to uphold or bear the *rāṣṭra*. Thus, the householder who was expected to offer the oblation was accorded recognition as a supporter of the realm (and presumably of the *rājā* as well). In other words, the bond between the *rājā* and the *gṛhapati* was reinforced through such rituals. The relatively inexpensive nature of the sacrifice may have also contributed to its regular performance.

The other tendency was the brahmanization of rites of passage. These included the *śrāddha*, referred to earlier, the *upanayana* or initiation for boys belonging to the first three *varṇas* and marriage. This was very often accompanied by what may be described as the politicization of relations within the household. This was achieved, for instance, through the use of the *jaya* (literally victory) verses, supposed to have been conferred on Indra by Prajāpati, and regarded as the means whereby the former obtained victory over the *viś* (PGS 1.5.9). The use of these verses was prescribed during marriage (ApGS 11.6), and the *sīmantonnayana* (a ritual marking the first pregnancy of the wife, ibid.: 14.2), symbolizing in each

case, the assertion of control by the husband over his wife. Its use was also recommended during the *upanayana* (AGS 1.5.8) where it probably established the identity of the initiate with Indra. Thus, the use of these verses was viewed as a means of empowering a select social category.

The use of rituals for communication was accompanied by an attempt to standardize the qualities expected of priests. These included learning, proper parentage, good speech, good looks, the right age, virtuousness and following the prescribed occupations (e.g. GDS 11.13, 14). The insistence on such attributes was probably necessary in a situation where disparate groups were coming into contact with one another. Obviously, not all the ritual or religious practices of such groups would have been useful from the point of view of the dominant political or religious categories which were emerging. As such, the need to restrict and define those who were eligible to participate in ritual occasions may have become more acute.

In general, efforts to communicate the values associated with the new political order provided information of a certain kind, especially relating to what were regarded as the laudable achievements of the *rājā*. More important, they tried to ensure acceptance for the institution of *rājya*. This was attempted through the ritualization of communications relating to the *rājā*, and through the development of the notion of the sacrosanct character of the man and the institution. At another level, a concerted effort was made to mobilize support for the *rājā* by connecting him with the household in general and with the male householder in particular. The latter resulted in a growing dependence on the priesthood for communicative purposes. The priests, as we have seen, were particularly valuable in creating 'redundancy', that is, in reiterating connections or justifications on a variety of occasions. Hence, it is not surprizing that their role was crucial in ensuring the legitimization of *rājya* as well.

VI

The means of communication outlined were closely linked to the

legitimization of *rājya*. As noted earlier, the association, implicitly or explicitly, with notions of sacrality was particularly important for conferring legitimacy. Such associations were especially close in the case of both the divine and the human *rājās* and it was this basic connection which was developed in a number of directions. At the same time, this intrinsic association of the *rājā* with the sacred was probably weakened by two developments—one, the emergence of a professional priesthood, whose very existence depended on its ability to establish and maintain a monopoly over definitions of the sacred, and the second, the development of the institution of *rājya* in the course of which the *rājā* moved away from the ideals of Varuṇa and Soma, and became more Indra-like. As such, the *rājā* could probably no longer claim to be connected with the sacred on the earlier basis, and had to work out his position afresh. These developments are reflected in the tendency to evolve large-scale sacrifices such as the *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha* and *vājapeya*. However, this also was not adequate for legitimizing *rājya*, and ultimately, alternative possibilities were explored.

The bonds of both Varuṇa and Soma with the sacred were close in both the early and the later Vedic traditions. Varuṇa was thought to bring Agni to the sacrifice (RV 3.4.2). Besides, he was expected to protect what was well-offered (AB 3.13.14) and seize what was badly offered (PVB 15.7.7) in the sacrificial context. Moreover, his permission was sought before performing a sacrifice (PVB 24.18.2, 8).

If Varuṇa was assigned the role of guardian of the sacrifice, Soma was virtually identified with it (Deshmukh 1933: 281, SB 3.9.4.23). Hence, if the attributes of the divine *rājās* reflected those of the early Vedic *rājā*, as argued earlier, then he was in all likelihood closely connected with the ritual.

In the early Vedic context, it is probable that this association was focused on the *vidatha*, an assembly where both divine and human *rājās* were expected to be present, and where sacrifices were performed (e.g. RV 3.3.3), probably accompanied by the distribution of wealth (ibid.: 3.26.6).

The *vidatha* was evidently a popular assembly during the early Vedic phase (R.S. Sharma 1991: 87). However, it is virtually never

mentioned in later literature. It is likely that this was partly owing to the particular form of the cult and the economic relations with which it was associated. While these may have been adequate in the context of a relatively undifferentiated socio-economic order, it is possible that gathering together in the *vidatha* to sacrifice or share wealth was probably no longer feasible in the more complex social situation which was emerging. It is also likely that it was not possible to raise or resolve the new issues which were acquiring importance through the relatively egalitarian framework provided by the *vidatha*. For instance, the problem of who was to be a *rājā* and how or why does not seem to have been posed in the context of the *vidatha*. Such issues were sought to be resolved through the use of different sacral mechanisms.

Although the nature of sacral activity changed, the *rājā*'s links to the sacred continued to be reiterated. This is evident from the prescription (AB 7.34.2) requiring members of the first three *varṇas* to request the *kṣatriya* for a place in which to perform the sacrifice. Even when the sacrifice declined in importance and was replaced by an emphasis on acquiring sacred learning, Vedic learning was to stop on the death of the *rājā* (GDS 16.32), presumably because the existence of the *rājā* was regarded as essential for the pursuit of sacral activities. This was probably owing to the notion of the intrinsic purity of the *rājā* (GDS 14.43, VDS 19.48). Besides *rājās* such as Pravāhaṇa Jaivāli (CU 5.3.7), Aśvapati Kaikeya (ibid.: 5.11.5) and Ajātaśatru (BAU 2.1.15) were associated with the redefinition of sacred knowledge within the Upanisadic tradition. This was connected with a shift away from the centrality accorded to the sacrifice within the earlier, priestly sacrificial tradition, even though much of the discourse was evidently located within the earlier framework, apparent in the frequent search for the 'real' meaning of ritual activity.

The *rājā*'s generalized claims to connection with the sacred were not, however, adequate to legitimize his position in the later Vedic phase and subsequently. This was probably related to the changing nature of *rājya*, in which the problem of legitimization became more complex as the *rājā* aspired to assert control over different social

categories and had to be able to win the support of different, often conflicting, social groups.

The problem of legitimizing *rājya* in the later Vedic phase is reflected in two tendencies explored in myths. On the one hand, there are references to the making of a *rājā* or the assumption of *rājya* by a particular god. For instance, the gods decide to make a *rājā* (*rājānam karavāmahe*) in order to ensure victory against the *asuras* (AB 1.3.3). Elsewhere (SB 2.6.4.2–3), Agni, Varuṇa and Indra agree to act as *rājās* of the gods in their fight against Vṛtra. In both instances, the problem posed by a conflict was resolved through the setting up of a *rājā*.

The second possibility involved a more or less similar resolution but emphasized an intermediate use of rituals. While these myths may have been developed to 'explain' ritual activity, there are significant differences between the description of rituals on the mythical and the human planes. More important, *rājya* on the human plane was rarely justified or legitimized in terms of leadership in battles or in terms of a contract between the people and the *rājā*. In fact, it was the second possibility of using rituals to both attain and justify *rājya* which was developed extensively. This was a significant shift, as it suggested that the legitimacy of *rājya* did not rest on a popular decision, but rather on an ability to perform rituals which were concrete expressions of access to the sacred, and which, by virtually deifying the human *rājā*, served to establish claims to *rājya* on a basis which was very different from that of popular support.

The major sacrifices which legitimized *rājya*, the *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha* and *vājapeya*, often incorporated popular rituals including variations of the *soma* sacrifice (e.g. SB 5.1.3.1), ritualized contests such as dicing (in the *rājasūya*) and chariot- racing (in the *vājapeya*) and rites associated with the agricultural cycle such as the *cāturmāsyas* (in the *rājasūya*). Besides, they were depicted as events of cosmogonic significance, through associations with Prajāpati (SB 5.3.3.15, 13.1.1.1). At another level, they provided a means for organizing and ordering social relations between and amongst men belonging to various *varṇas*, and of regulating kinship ties amongst men as well as the relationship between the genders. Thus, the

rājā who, as the *yajamāna*, was the focus of such sacrifices was connected with a range of issues, and this connection, implying an ability to intervene in and ensure the 'proper' resolution of such issues, was sanctified through the ritual, which provided both an occasion for delineating the social and economic policies associated with the *rājā* and through the very process of delineation and sanctification, probably ensured their implementation as well.

The rituals were also explicitly regarded as occasions whereby the *rājā*'s status was either potentially or actually transformed and recognized as such. For instance, the *vājapeya* was prescribed for the *yajamāna* who aspired to *sāmrājya* (SB 5.1.1.13) while the successful performance of the *aśvamedha* was thought to render a man fit for the *abhiṣeka* (ibid.: 13.4.2.17). The *rājasūya*, as its very name suggests, was viewed as a means of becoming a *rājā* (ibid.: 5.1.1.12).

The goals envisaged were expressed in concrete terms through visual displays and oral statements which acquired added significance in a context which was at once sacred and spectacular. One common device employed was that of the mounting of the throne (e.g. SB 5.4.4.1, in the context of the *rājasūya*). This provided a visible representation of the distinction between the *rājā* who was allotted a unique seat, and the rest of those present at the sacrifice. The physical act of sitting was invested with symbolic meaning, it being regarded as a means of making the *rājā dhṛtavrata* and hence identical with Varuṇa (ibid.: 5.4.4.5). Similarly, in the *aindramahābhiṣeka* (AB 8.38.1), the mounting of the throne by Indra on the divine plane and the *yajamāna* on the human plane was thought to represent his accession to *bhaujya*, *svārājya*, *vairājya*, *rājya*, *pārameṣṭhya*, *māhārājya*, *ādhipatya*, *svāvaśya* and *ātiṣṭhya*.[24]

Central to the rituals legitimizing *rājya* was the *abhiṣeka* or sprinkling or anointing of the *rājā* with potent fluids.[25] This was

[24] *Bhaujya* probably indicated some kind of overlordship (Keith 1920: 330). The last five terms are translated by Keith (ibid.: 330–331) as superior authority, great kingship, suzerainty, supremacy and pre-eminence. The other terms have been examined earlier.

[25] The term *rājasūya* probably originally referred to the unction water and was later extended to the entire ritual (Heesterman 1957: 86). The centrality of

viewed as a means of empowering the *rājā* (and of recognizing his power).[26] Myths pertaining to the *abhiṣeka* suggest that initially the ritual contained an element of conditionality and involved the active participation of the people who elevated one amongst themselves to the position of the *rājā*. For instance, the gods were thought to have performed the *abhiṣeka* of Agni in order to please him and ask for the things they wanted (SB 9.3.2.6). This evidently worked, and was explicitly recognized as analogous to the situation on the human plane. Elsewhere (AB 8.38.1) the gods are depicted as deciding to perform Indra's *abhiṣeka* on account of or in recognition of his strength and his ability to accomplish (probably desired objects). Thus, the *rājā* may have been selected by people on grounds of generosity or ability, including prowess and strength, this selection being demonstrated through the *abhiṣeka*. The fact that this was performed publicly provided for the dissemination of information regarding the *rājā*'s change of status.

While the *abhiṣeka* was retained and even considerably elaborated in the ritual context (e.g. SB 5.3.4.3, 5), the basis on which it was performed was evidently quite different, although the mythical associations were never explicitly repudiated. In the first place, the ability to get the *abhiṣeka* performed was now implicitly linked to the ability to get sacrifices performed. This in turn would have been related to access to economic resources and priestly support. In other words, popular support as a criterion for gaining acceptance as a *rājā* was replaced by individual claims to the position on a different basis.[27]

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the *abhiṣeka* for legitimizing rulership is also referred to in the Jātakas, where the term *muddhābhisitta khattiya* (a *kṣatriya* whose head has been anointed) occurs as a stereotyped term for describing rulers (Ghoshal 1966a: 16–17). The importance of the *abhiṣeka* was also recognized in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Brockington 1984: 127).

[26] For instance, the *abhiṣeka* during the *rājasūya* was viewed as a means of endowing the *rājā* with the *dyumna* or brilliance of Soma, *tejas* or lustre of Agni, *varcas* or splendour of Sūrya, *indriya* or strength of Indra, *vīrya* or valour of Mitra and Varuṇa, and *ojas* or power of the Maruts (BSS 12.11). Such an understanding also served to identify the sacrificer with a range of deities.

[27] A somewhat similar shift is discernible in the context of the chariot race of the *vājapeya*. According to Gonda (1969: 85), the race: 'represents a test for

At the same time, popular participation in the *abhiṣeka* was ritualized rather than completely eliminated. In the *rājasūya*, for instance, the *abhiṣeka* was to be performed by the *adhvaryu*, *sva*, *rājanya* and *vaiśya* (SB 5.3.5.11–14).[28] The order in which the participants were ranked was hierarchical, with the priest being placed first, while the *vaiśya*, the representative of the people, ranked last.

Closely related to the *abhiṣeka* was the proclamation of the change of status of the *rājā*.[29] Here, once again, there is a divergence between the mythical and the ritual plane. In the context of the *aindramahābhiṣeka*, for instance, we are told that Indra was unable to display his valour till his change of status was proclaimed by the Viśvedevas, (literally all-gods, frequently referred to as the divine *viś*). For the human *rājā*, however, the ability to effect a change of status was restricted to proclamation by the *rājakartṛs* (literally *rājā*-makers, AB 8.39.3), specifically defined as the priests.

This shift in the ritual context was, in fact, explicitly linked to the new definition of *rājya* which was emerging. For instance, in the *rājasūya* (e.g. SB 5.3.3.12), the proclamation of the *rājā* by the priests was accompanied by the *brāhmaṇas* declaring themselves to be outside his purview, claiming exemption from being eaten, which was symbolic of an appropriative relationship. In fact, if the *rājā* was no longer benevolent, then active popular support for proclaiming his change of status may have been less forthcoming. In such a situation, the *rājā*'s dependence on the priesthood as an alternative, to sanctify his position, may have become even greater.

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recognizing the rulers's superior valour and physical prowess, and as a means of enabling him to prove himself the fittest man for kingship'. While the race may have initially involved an actual contest, its ritualization and the consequent certainty of the outcome meant that the position of the *rājā* was no longer determined on the basis of prowess, but rather on the ability to get the requisite ritual performed.

[28] In the Black Yajur Vedic tradition, the *sva*, literally one's own kinsman, was replaced by the *janya*, i.e. one of the people of the *jana*, who was placed fourth (e.g. BSS 12.9, ApSS 18.16.5).

[29] Such proclamations formed part of the *rājasūya* (BSS 12.9) and *aśvamedha* (ApSS 20.4.3).

Initially, however, the *rājā* attempted to muster the support of other personnel as well. These included the *sūta* and *grāmaṇī*, regarded as *arājanaḥ rājakartṛs* (SB 3.4.1.7), that is, non-*rājās* who were, at the same time, *rājā*-makers and who were amongst the *ratnins* or jewels whose support was sought for the *rājā* during the *ratnīnāmhavīṃśi* of the *rājasūya*.[30] The formula used in connection with the offerings made by the *rājā* in the homes of the *ratnins* is significant—'it is for him (i.e. the *ratnin*) that he (i.e. the *rājā*) is thereby consecrated. He (the *rājā*) thereby prevents him (the *ratnin*) from deserting him' (SB 5.3.1.1– 13).[31] Thus, the ritual was used to establish bonds between the *rājā* and those on whose political support he depended.[32]

At another level, attempts were made to widen the political scope of these rituals. Thus, while they were primarily viewed as a means of legitimately acquiring *rājya*, other possibilities were often incorporated as well. For instance, the initiation for the *aśvamedha* was viewed as a means of acquiring *ādhipatya* and *svārājya*, while the *rājasūya* was regarded as a means of acquiring *bhaujya*, *vairājya*, *sāmrājya svārājya* (AB 7.35.6), and *ādhipatya* (BSS 10.56, SSS 15.12.1) as was the *vājapeya* (ASS 9.9.1). Such tendencies reached their culmination in the *aindramahābhiṣeka* which was performed for *sāmrājya*, *bhaujya*, *svārājya*, *vairājya* and *rājya* (AB 8.38.3, 8.39.5). In the same context, each of these possibilities of

[30] The functions of most of the *ratnins* have been referred to earlier. The significance of the rite has been variously assessed. According to Altekar (1962: 77), it created a 'feeling of attachment and loyalty'. Others such as Dharma (1947: 223) and Law (1960: 11) argue that inspite of its original significance, it was gradually reduced to a mere formality. Gonda (1969: 43) and Heesterman (1957: 56), on the other hand, emphasize its non-political significance. According to the former, the twelve *ratnins* represented the twelve parts of the year, whereas the latter considers them to be symbolic of the womb or embryonic covers from which the *yajamāna*/*rājā* emerges.

[31] The alternative *mantra* prescribed in the Black Yajur Vedic tradition has been referred to earlier (Chapter V).

[32] Just as the position of the *rājā* was legitimized through rituals, so also was that of the *sūta*, *grāmaṇī* and *sthapati* legitimized through the *sūta sava* (BSS 18.4, SSS 14.22.1), *grāmaṇī sava* (SSS 14.22.3) and *sthapati sava* (PVB 17.11.6, BSS 18.3, SSS 14.22.2) respectively. Most of these rituals included an *abhiṣeka*.

rulership/leadership was equated with *rājya*, by stating that *rājās* of the east were known as *samrājs*, those of the south as *bhojas*, those of the west as *svarājs*, those of the north as *virājs*, and those of *madhyadeśa* (literally the central land, and by extension the epicentre of civilisation) as *rājās*. This was clearly a means of encompassing diverse possibilities within the definition of *rājya* and may have been a means whereby individual *rājās* could extend their sphere of influence by claiming identity with local chiefs, possibly usurping their power and authority in the process. It is also likely that such identifications may have bolstered the position of the *rājā* in other ways as well. We had noted earlier that supremacy was not intrinsic to the definition of *rājya*. However, if the *rājā* was identified with the *adhipati* or the *śreṣṭha*, he would have acquired access to a different definition of power and authority. The continued identification with the *virāj* would, at the same time, have ensured popular support. Thus, alternative possibilities of leadership or rulership were assimilated to the definition of *rājya* for different reasons.

As in the case of the *soma* sacrifice, the discovery and/or initial performance of the sacrifices which legitimized *rājya* was attributed to the gods. For instance, the *rājasūya* was thought to have been discovered by Varuṇa (SB 5.3.4.12), the *aindramahābhiṣeka* was supposed to have been performed by Prajāpati for Indra (AB 8.38.2), while the *vājapeya* was thought to have been performed by Bṛhaspati or Indra (SB 5.1.1.11). This meant that the *rājā/yajamāna* who followed in their footsteps was virtually recreating a divine act, implying his identity with the gods.

A distinctive feature of the *rājasūya* was the attempt to link the *rājā* with a number of deities, especially through the *devasūhavīṁśi* (e.g. SB 5.3.3.1–13) where Savitṛ Satyaprasava, Agni Gṛhapati, Soma Vanaspati, Bṛhaspati Vācaspati, Indra Jyeṣṭha, Rudra Paśupati, Mitra Satya and Varuṇa Dharmapati were expected to endow the sacrificer with their characteristic attributes. This may have been useful as a means of ensuring the support of different social categories or people who probably identified more closely with one or the other deity.

The performance of such rituals reinforced the definition of

rājya at a number of levels—the message that the *rājā* was unique and was essential for the existence of the social and natural order was reiterated time and again by deifying the *rājā*, by linking him with a range of socio-economic issues and by explicitly recognizing his status. However, the need to reiterate the message repeatedly points to a situation where acceptance may not have been complete. As much is suggested by the existence of rituals for reinstating a *rājā*. These included the *sautrāmaṇī* (SB 12.9.3.1–6) and the *punarābhiṣeka* (AB 8.37.1). The provision for such sacrifices indicates that *rājās* could be and probably were challenged and hence had to take recourse to such devices (Roy 1984: 88).

It is likely that it was in this context that an effort was made to define an exclusive ritual tradition related to *rājās*. This involved, on the one hand, a marginalization of alternative ritual traditions and cults, and the consolidation of a single, homogeneous tradition to which the *rājā* could appeal.

The first process is indicated by the treatment accorded to the *sthapati*. The later Vedic tradition indicates that he was associated with ritual activities, performing sacrifices such as *sattras* for *vrātyas* (PVB 24.18.2), the *vrātyastoma* (BSS 18.26) and the *sautrāmaṇī* (SB 12.8.1.17). Moreover, he was conceived of as being endowed with *brahmavarcas* and *tejas* (ibid.), lustre, especially of the priestly variety, attributes which were otherwise considered typical of the *brāhmaṇa*. However, both the *sthapati* and the rituals with which he was connected were gradually marginalized. In the post-Vedic tradition the former was secularized completely,[33] while the *vrātyastoma* and the *sautrāmaṇī*, although incorporated within the brahmanical tradition, were not regarded as of central significance for the attainment of *rājya*.

The second process was reflected in the development and preservation of lists of the performers of rituals such as the *aindra-mahābhiṣeka* (AB 8.39.7–9), *aśvamedha* (SB 13.5.4.1–23, SSS 16. 8.27) and *rājasūya* (AB 7.35.8). Such lists were probably important for both priests and *rājās*. The former could cite precedents and

[33] He was regarded as an architect, master builder, carpenter or wheelwright in the post-Vedic tradition (SED: s.v.).

* - indicates that the person who was being could always be threatened by another claimant who could use same rituals to justify his rājya

encourage the performance of rituals, while the latter could acquire distinction and recognition by identifying with predecessors who were recognized as illustrious.

Thus, the association with a well-defined ritual tradition of *rājya* was recognized as important. It is this which probably explains the belief that a *rājā* alone could make another man a *rājā* (PVB 19.1.2). This was true in a number of ways. A *rājā*'s success was probably measured in terms of other *rājās*—thus each *rājā* provided the context within which other similar leaders could emerge. At another level, *rājās* may have supported one another against alternative forms of leadership which were regarded as being threatening.[34] Hence, although individual *rājās* may have competed with one another, there were certain shared interests in the development and maintenance of the institution which bound them together so that the very existence of one provided an example and a means of legitimizing the position of others.[35]

While the importance of large-scale sacrifices was never explicitly negated, and they continued to be performed occasionally till the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Kashikar and Parpola 1986: 204 ff), alternative means of legitimization were also developed, two of which were particularly significant.

The first involved the incorporation of the messages central to the legitimization of *rājya* within the domestic cult. In most cases, this meant identifying the *rājā* with the *gṛhapati*. More generally, the social, economic and even cosmogonic goals envisaged for such rituals were brought into line with those associated with the major sacrifices. This shift permitted legitimization with a certain regularity and with an almost uniform intensity. While large-scale sacrifices may have impressed witnesses or participants with a sense of the power and importance of the *rājā*, it may have been more difficult to sustain this impression on a long-term basis. The transfer of similar values to the domestic cult provided for precisely this

[34] This is explicitly evident in the hostility towards the *gaṇa-saṃghas* in a slightly different context.

[35] It is likely that this connection operated both synchronically and diachronically.

situation, ensuring as it did the sustenance of the notions related to *rājya* on a virtually day-to-day basis.

The second means of legitimizing *rājya* was based on the increasing emphasis on the *rājā*'s role as the upholder of *dharma*. Given the scope of *dharma*, which could potentially encompass virtually every aspect of human activity, it meant that *rājya* was intrinsic to the social order.[36] In other words, the means whereby *rājya* was legitimized were universalized and were no longer restricted to specific sacrificial occasions, whether large-scale or domestic.

Thus the process whereby *rājya* was legitimized developed in a fairly complex manner during the period under consideration. Briefly, a situation in which problems of legitimization were not central gradually gave way to one in which various possibilities were explored. These were related to notions of sacrality with which the *rājā* seems to have been intrinsically associated even during the early Vedic phase. The emphasis on the sacred basis of *rājya* in the later Vedic period and subsequently, however, implied a shift from the early Vedic notions of *rājya*. The *rājā* no longer obtained unchallenged popular support, but had to ensure this through complex rituals, which increased his dependence on the priesthood. However, the problem of ensuring the participation of people in such rituals remained. Hence, an attempt was made to integrate the ideals of *rājya* with those of the household. Thus, the *rājā* could be connected with each and every household or at least with its head. In other words, an attempt was made to take the *rājā* to the people rather than bring the people to the *rājā*.

It is evident then, that the structures of support which developed in connection with *rājya* underwent a number of changes during the period under consideration. Thus, voluntary gifts to the *rājā* were gradually systematized through the use of rituals and overtly coercive mechanisms. Related to this, the latter were systematized

[36] A somewhat similar development is discernible in medieval south India, where: 'the claim to royal authority changed from one based upon royal sacrifice and genealogy, traced through royal *yajamānas* and fortified by military prowess, to a claim of authority based solely upon kingly maintenance of *dharma* and upon royal prestation (*dāna*)' (Stein 1984: 29).

and transformed—the ability to fight was now concentrated in the hands of a few—those who were connected with the chariot. At another level, there was an attempt to develop the notion of the *rājā* as a wielder of *daṇḍa*, with wide-ranging social implications. Besides, efforts were made to develop a range of communication networks. Simultaneously, a variety of means were used to legitimize the position of the *rājā*. These changes were related to the emergence of a number of social categories which provided the context within which these structures of support emerged.

Chapter Seven

The Context of Rājya (1): From Viś to Varṇa

The *brāhmaṇa* was his face, from the *rājanya* was made his arms,
what was his thigh formed the *vaiśya*, the *śūdra* was born from
his feet.

Ṛg Veda.

I

The influence of a relatively fluid context on the development of the institution of *rājya* has been implicit in much of the preceding discussion. Some of the changes in the social context resulted from the attempts of the *rājā* to widen his sphere of influence. Others were probably related to different processes which were not (or could not be) directly controlled by him. Both kinds of changes were politically significant—while this may be obvious in the first case, it was equally true of the second, which delineated the limits within which the *rājā* functioned and pointed to the existence of alternative sources of power and authority which could not be effectively challenged or undermined.

Varṇa, which became virtually synonymous with a unique system of social classification, emerged in this context. The discussion on *varṇa* within the brahmanical tradition represented both an attempt to understand the processes of change as well as to direct them by the priesthood who claimed the highest position within the hierarchy. Not surprizingly, the two aims often led to contradictions and incongruities evident in the description of social conditions which on the one hand were emerging or existed, and on the other, were conceived of as the ideal. While efforts were made to work around such problems, these were not entirely successful. As such, the evidence provided by the brahmanical tradition, despite

its inherent biases, provides a framework for examining the changing social context.

I had argued that the process whereby the institution of *rājya* was established or consolidated brought together different peoples whose status was initially recognized as more or less identical, but who, in coming into contact with one another, were gradually related, not on a basis of equality, but on a hierarchical basis, with those who controlled the process of interaction assuming positions of dominance. At the same time, it is likely that changes were occurring within each of these units as well. What emerged as the *varṇa* hierarchy probably developed as a result of both these processes.[1]

The resultant changes are reflected in the terminology used to define society and social units. In the early, and to a certain extent in the later Vedic tradition as well, one of the commonest terms used to denote both the totality of human society as well as specific, more or less similar and independent units which constituted the whole was *viś* (R.S. Sharma 1983a: 48). Moreover, both divine and human leaders or rulers were conceived of in terms of the *viś*. Thus Indra (RV 3.40.3) and Agni (ibid.: 2.1.8) were regarded as *viś-patis*,[2] and human *rājās* were often specifically proclaimed as *rājās* of the *viś*.

What is as significant is that those who were outside a particular social unit were also conceived of as constituting a *viś*. This is evident from references to the *dāsa viś* (RV 2.11.4). While the *dāsas* were often regarded as enemies and prayers were offered in

[1] The process of growing interaction amongst the *viś* may be conceived of as follows: an initial stage of marginal contact amongst the *viś*, each of which may have had a distinct socio-economic system; in the second stage, members of one *viś* establish closer links with those of the others. In the process, those assuming the initiative in establishing such contacts also assert their dominance over the relationships amongst different *viś*. Thus, differentiation amongst the *viś* is likely. At the same time, the fact that not every member of the dominating or dominated *viś* had equal or identical access to the means of communication would have meant that differentiation could and probably did take place *within* each *viś* as well.

[2] There is also a reference to a divine *viśpatnī*, Sinīvālī (RV 2.32.7), the term being translated as the woman head of a clan (Jaiswal 1981: 56).

order to overcome them, they were, at the same time, thought to be more or less similar to those who opposed them, as is evident from their designation as a *viś*. A similar understanding of different peoples constituting more or less similar social units was evident in the context of the *pāriplava* cycle.

This relatively simple system of social classification gave way to a more complex one. This is reflected, to an extent, in the use of the word *varṇa* instead of *viś* to designate opposed social groups, typified in the notion of the *ārya varṇa* as opposed to the *dasyus* (RV 3.34.9), this duality being replaced by that between the *ārya* and the *śūdra* in the later Vedic tradition (PVB 5.5.14, SB 12.9.2.3). While the usage of the term *varṇa* in these contexts was apparently synonymous with the term *viś*, this similarity was superficial, for while a *viś* could be conceived of as a total, holistic unit, a *varṇa* was defined and acquired significance only in terms of other *varṇas*. In other words, the shift from defining the social unit in terms of a single *viś* to defining it in terms of two or more *varṇas* points to the growing importance of social differentiation. It is likely that the shift from *viś* to *varṇa*, literally colour, was also a means of focusing on differences amongst groups which were envisaged as functioning within a common framework—while all of the groups were equated with *varṇas* or colours, each *varṇa* was different.

Another dimension of the same process is reflected in the tendency to use the term *viś* or *vaiśya* (literally of the *viś*) for one of the *varṇas* rather than for the entire social unit. This shrinking of the semantic significance of the term is evident, for instance, in stereotyped lists of social categories, which frequently included the *brahma*, *kṣatra* and *viś* (SB 4.2.2.14, SSS 4.9.2). Thus, what initially represented the whole was increasingly viewed as no more than a part of a more complex unit.

The growing emphasis on classifying the social order in terms of *varṇas* did not however lead to the immediate standardization of the four-fold system, consisting of the *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra*. This is evident from variations in the order in which the *varṇas* are referred to. In one instance (SB 13.8.3.11), the *kṣatriya* was placed on top of the hierarchy, whereas in another instance (ibid.: 1.1.4.12), the *brāhmaṇa* was followed by the

vaiśya, rājanya bandhu and *śūdra*. In other words, while the process of social differentiation was recognized, the relative position of specific social categories was more fluid and open to change. It was only in the Dharma Sūtras that the four-fold order was standardized (e.g. ADS 1.1.1.4, BDS 1.8.16.1, VDS 2.1). While this may suggest an element of stability, the constant need to reiterate the four- fold division and its significance suggests that this may have been challenged as well.

Both the attempts to crystallize social differentiation in terms of *varṇa* and the challenges to this process centred around certain crucial social issues, including access to and control over the prerequisities of material well-being, political power and authority, and the domain of the sacred. The treatment of these issues within the brahmanical tradition provides an understanding of the complex context of *rājya*.

Mythical evidence pertaining to *varṇa* may be divided into two broad categories. On the one hand, gods were occasionally identified in terms of *varṇa*. For instance, Bṛhaspati or Brahmaṇaspati (RV 2.24.9), and to a lesser extent, Agni, were equated with the first, Indra, Varuṇa, Soma and Yama with the second, the Viśvedevas and Maruts with the third, and Pūṣan occasionally identified with the last *varṇa* (BAU 1.4.13). The attributes ascribed to the gods, many of which have been referred to earlier, are useful in enabling us to determine the features considered typical of specific *varṇas*. Besides, in instances where a single deity such as Agni was considered representative of more than one *varṇa*, it is likely that the differences between the two *varṇas* (in this case the *brahma* and *kṣatra*) were not as yet sharply delineated. At another level, creation myths pertaining to *varṇa* such as the Puruṣasūkta and its variants were reiterated almost throughout the brahmanical tradition and were evidently valuable for legitimizing the *varṇa*-based order.[3]

The legitimization of *varṇa* was more systematically attempted through a range of rituals and prescriptions. The former included

[3] Incidentally, in the Puruṣasūkta itself (RV 10.90.13), Indra and Agni are referred to as sharing a common birth from the face or mouth of the *puruṣa* while Vāyu is born from his breath. The creation of the other deities is not referred to. Besides, none of these deities is associated with *varṇas*.

both large-scale sacrifices such as the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha*, as well as domestic rites of passage and sacrifices. Besides, there are incidental references, both general and specific, to men belonging to various *varṇas*. These are particularly useful in corroborating or modifying analyses based on other types of evidence.

It is important to note that *varṇa* was one amongst a number of means of defining and organizing social (and by extension political) relations. This is evident from references to *varṇadharma* being modified according to *deśa*, *jāti* and *kuladharma* (VDS 19.7), that is, the precepts and practices specific to regions, social categories and kin groups. However, the distinctive elements of such *dharmas* are not discussed. Hence, although it is likely that some of these may have run counter to the definition of *varṇadharma*, we are not in a position to determine the exact nature of the relationship between and amongst these spheres. What needs to be borne in mind is that *varṇa* represented one, possibly the most important, example of the institutionalization of social relationships. This was politically significant, as it rested on inegalitarian ties amongst men belonging to various *varṇas*. As such, its development was closely related to the institutionalization of political power. Hence, although an analysis of *varṇa* is not synonymous with an analysis of the entire social order, it is useful in focusing attention on significant socio-political relationships.

II

The importance of access to productive resources or produce and mechanisms of exchange as a basis for claiming power or authority is widely recognized. While much of the available information within the brahmanical tradition pertains to ritual exchanges such as *dāna* and *dakṣiṇā*, these point to the problems inherent in forcing economic relationships within the *varṇa* framework,[4] and suggest

[4] As R.S. Sharma (1983a: 74) points out with reference to the later Vedic period: 'These (*varṇas*) cannot be regarded as four separate social classes in the sense that some of them owned land, cattle, pasture grounds and implements and others were completely deprived of them.'

the existence and emergence of alternative, occasionally conflicting, bases of power.

Not surprizingly, most of these systems of exchange were discussed at length in the human context—through rituals and prescriptions. While there are some references to gods receiving *bali*, there are virtually no myths pertaining to the giving and receiving of *dakṣiṇā* and *dāna*, or of the newer forms of taxes, or of the gods engaging in trade or service. Clearly, the issues posed by these exchanges could not be reconciled with the values embedded in the earlier mythological tradition and were hence explored at a different level.

Dakṣiṇā and *dāna* were supposed to accrue to *brāhmaṇas* in sacrificial and other ritual contexts. The objects transferred in such exchanges included a range of animals (e.g. BSS 2.7, 11.6), grain or grain produce (ibid.: 2.7), vehicles, mainly chariots and carts (ibid.: 12.4), cloth (e.g. ApSS 19.13.14), pots (ibid.: 22.9.18), metals, especially gold (ibid.: 17.23.5), and to a lesser extent, silver (BSS 15.3),[5] slaves or serving people (e.g. SSS 13.29.21), and very rarely, land (e.g. SSS 16.9.18–21).

Dakṣiṇā was expected from the *yajamāna* or sacrificer, no sacrifice being complete without it. This meant, in effect, that it was obtained from members of the first three *varṇas* who had legitimate access to the ritual. *Dāna*, likewise, was ideally prescribed for members of the first three *varṇas* (e.g. ADS 2.5.10.4–7, GDS 10.1, BDS 1.10.18.2–4, VDS 2.14, 16, 18) during rites of passage such as birth (SGS 1.24.13), the first cutting of the hair (ApGS 16.4, PGS 2.1.5, KGS 2.3.33), initiation (ApGS 11.17), the completion of Vedic learning (AGS 3.8.6, SGS 1.28.21), marriage (AGS 1.8.14, ApGS 9.4, SGS 1.11.8) and the *śrāddha* (PGS 3.10.48, ADS 2.8.19.16). Thus, those who could legitimately participate in such ritual exchanges were men of the first three *varṇas*. More importantly, while men of the first *varṇa* could function as both donor and donee, it was their role in the latter capacity which was regarded as particularly significant and sanctifying and which conferred a certain prestige on such exchanges.

[5] Gifts of utilitarian metals such as copper and iron were relatively rare.

It is in this context that the means whereby *brāhmaṇas* were expected to acquire wealth or earn their livelihood as standardized in the later Dharma Sūtras (e.g. GDS 10.2, BDS 1.10.18.2, VDS 16.16) needs to be viewed. These included performing sacrifices, getting sacrifices performed, giving and receiving gifts, and learning and teaching. While none of these activities were directly linked to production, they were connected with ritual exchange networks, rather obviously in the case of the first two sets of activities. Although less apparent, learning and teaching the sacred lore was, at one level, a means whereby the personnel considered eligible to participate in such exchanges could be trained. Hence it is not surprizing that the learned *brāhmaṇa* (*śuśruvat*) was regarded as one who had attained prosperity (*gataśrī*, BSS 17.49, SSS 2.6.5). Very often, moreover, the ideal donee was explicitly expected to be learned (SGS 1.2.3, ADS 2.6.15.11, GDS 5.21, VDS 6.26). At another level, the successful completion of the period of Vedic learning was marked by the giving of the *veda dakṣiṇā* (ADS 1.2.7.19), the teacher, presumably a learned *brāhmaṇa*, being directly rewarded.

We had seen that giving *dakṣiṇā* and *dāna* meant that a part of the produce of agriculturists and craft specialists was diverted through channels of controlled exchange. Given that participation in such exchanges was consistently portrayed as prestigious and/or meritorious, it is evident that primary producers were subjected to certain pressures to produce in order to make gifts. In other words, although *brāhmaṇas* could not directly control productive resources, they could exert pressure to ensure production for what was, in tangible terms, an unequal system of exchange.

At the same time, there are indications that the attempt to define the significance and nature of such exchanges was not entirely successful. This is evident, for instance, in the occasional denigration of those who depended on gifts (e.g. AB 7.35.3, BDS 2.2.4.26), which suggests that the brahmanical perception of the donee as deserving of respect was not necessarily universally accepted.

At another level, and more importantly, the difficulties in enforcing the system of gift-giving are reflected in the development of alternative provisions governing such exchanges. These often

widened the range of particīpants, permitting *brāhmaṇas* to accept gifts even from *śūdras* under certain 'difficult' circumstances (GDS 7.4). While this enabled priests to claim access to the resources of virtually every social category, it also implied that their effort to acquire resources from the more prestigious groups was not uniformly successful.

That *brāhmaṇas* faced problems in their attempt to ensure material well-being through gifts is also indicated by provisions for accepting virtually anything that was offered. These included water, seats, umbrellas, shoes (VDS 29.12, 13, 15, 18), as well as more substantial gifts such as houses or vehicles (ibid.: 29.14).[6]

Almost simultaneously, *brāhmaṇas* were 'permitted' to pursue alternative occupations during crises. These included agriculture (GDS 10.5, BDS 2.2.4.20–21), trade (ADS 1.7.20.11, GDS 10.5) and usury (GDS 10.6, BDS 1.5.10.26, VDS 2.43). In such cases it was recognized that they were no longer eligible to participate in the more prestigious if less profitable ritual exchanges (GDS 15.17, BDS 1.5.10.29, 31).[7]

It is evident then that the attempt to channelize access to produce or productive resources through the network of ritual exchanges was not very successful. This is reflected in the tendency to widen the network to include more donors and gifts, as well as in the reluctant recognition of alternative means of livelihood. Besides, the very perception of ritual exchanges as prestigious seems to have been contested.

This was related to the emergence of alternative systems of exchange, which could not be ritualized, and hence could not be controlled directly by the priesthood. These included the development of systems of tribute and taxation, details of which have been referred to earlier.

[6] Efforts were also made to ensure generosity through threats (VDS 8.6). At another level, *brāhmaṇas* sought to bolster their position by claiming to be the sole donors of *vidyā* or learning, which was intangible, but was, at the same time, portrayed as the most meritorious of gifts (ibid.: 29.19).

[7] That *brāhmaṇas* actually did follow a range of occupations is suggested by the Jātakas, which refer to *brāhmaṇa* physicians, soldiers, cultivators, tradesmen, shepherds, carpenters and hunters (Dutt 1968: 218).

In terms of *varṇa*, access to the second form of exchange was restricted to the *kṣatriya* or *rājanya* whose prescribed means of livelihood included *daṇḍa* or the administration of justice, and *yuddha* or participating in battles (ADS 2.5.10.6). The performance of such functions was often explicitly linked to the ability to legitimately collect taxes (BDS 1.10.18.1, VDS 1.42).

As in the case of the priesthood, this implied a degree of control over produce or productive resources. That such control was exercised fairly successfully is evident from incidental references to *kṣatriyas* or *rājanyas* as prosperous or wealthy (BSS 17.49, ApSS 5.14.1). Given the fact that they were often explicitly characterized as non-producing (SB 8.7.1.2, 8.7.2.2), such prosperity indicated a fair amount of success in channelling the flow of goods and services from the primary producers to those who claimed to be representatives of the second *varṇa*.

The success of the *rājanya* or *kṣatriya* in acquiring access to produce is also reflected in the relatively meagre discussion on alternative means of livelihood open to them in times of distress. While the possibility of adopting the activities of the *vaiśya* is recognized, (GDS 7.26), this is rarely discussed at length. This may either indicate that the subject was not of central concern to the brahmanical authorities, or, alternatively, that such variations were less real, and were hence simply recognized as a theoretical possibility.[8]

The growing ability of the *rājā* and his supporters to obtain tribute or taxes was closely related to the changing *rājā-viś* relationship referred to earlier. That this was associated with a transformation in the forms of exchange which bound the two categories is evident from the contrast between the position of the *viś* in myths and that accorded to it in rituals.

Myths, which probably reflect an earlier situation, frequently refer to the *viś* getting a share in whatever the *kṣatriya* wins. In one instance (SB 2.4.3.4–6), Indra and Agni, symbolic of the *kṣatra*, were conceived of as winning a race. However, the Viśvedevas, the

[8] The discussion of alternative occupations permissible to the *vaiśya* is almost identical, probably for similar reasons.

divine counterpart of the *viś*, were accorded a share in the spoils of victory on the ground that the *viś* had a share in whatever was won by the *kṣatra*.

References to the *viś* receiving a share, or to ensuring a share for the *viś* are virtually non-existent in later Vedic rituals. What is more, the *kṣatra* was conceived of as appropriating the resources of the *viś*, this being legitimized through a range of sacrifices. Thus, the *viś* was conceived of as food for the *kṣatra* (SB 4.2.1.17, 13.2.9.8, AB 7.35.3) and rituals were manipulated to ensure that the latter obtained a share in whatever belonged to the former (SB 1.3.2.15). In other words, there was a virtual reversal of the relationship as envisaged in earlier myths.

The attempts to obtain a share of the produce of the *viś* indicate that the *viś* itself was now in a position to generate or acquire resources which the *kṣatriya* could not control directly. In such a situation, the latter was implicitly, if not explicitly dependent on the former. As much is evident from the prescription of a range of rituals devised to coerce or cajole the *viś* into submission. These included, as we have seen, variations on the *soma* sacrifice, as well as more complex rituals such as the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha*.

Incidental references also point to the prosperity of the *viś* or *vaiśya*. A typical *viś* was characterized as *bahupaśu* or possessed of many animals (PVB 6.1.10) and was also regarded as symbolic of *puṣṭi* or nourishment (AA 1.1.1.6). Besides, a *vaiśya* was expected to tide over his misfortunes with the help of his *dhana* or wealth (VDS 26.16). This implied that he was normally wealthy. In fact, this was thought to constitute the basis of his strength. Such prosperity was, moreover, implicitly, if not explicitly, connected with his typical means of livelihood, which included agriculture, trade, and occasionally, usury (ADS 2.5.10.7, GDS 10.48, BDS 1.10.18.4, VDS 2.19). What is noteworthy is that agriculture or cattle-rearing as envisaged for the *vaiśya* did not imply subsistence activities but represented production for exchange. In other words, those classified as *vaiśyas* were gradually opening up new networks of exchange or developing earlier ones along new lines. While the development of such networks may have been related to and encouraged by the growth of communication for political and/or ritual

requirements, they were relatively autonomous and could not be subjected to direct political or ritual control.[9]

The economic activities of the *śūdra* were almost as difficult to control. Theoretically, the *śūdra* was assigned the duty of *paricaryā* or servitude (GDS 10.56, BDS 1.10.18.5, VDS 2.20), that is, he had the right to participate only in exchanges of labour which were ideally not rewarded in tangible terms. In practice, however, the possibility of some *śūdras* acquiring wealth was recognized almost throughout the brahmanical tradition. For instance, a *śūdra* could be *bahupaśu* (possessed of numerous cattle, PVB 6.1.11) or *bahupuṣṭa* or well-nourished (ApSS 5.14.1).[10] Besides, the *śūdra*, like the *vaiśya*, was expected to tide over misfortune through the use of his wealth (VDS 26.16).

Thus, a wide range of systems of exchange evolved during the period under consideration. This may have been related to the coming together of different peoples. Each such group probably had its own system of exchange. In a situation where they were brought into contact with one another, the relation amongst such forms of exchange in terms of resources and personnel specific to each required definition. It is also likely, given the context in which such contact occurred, that some forms of exchange may have developed more systematically than others. In other words, these systems were potentially, and often actually, contentious and conflicting. For instance, there was a continuous conflict regarding the relative importance (often defined or disguised as sanctity) to be assigned to them. While the brahmanical authors attempted to reiterate the importance of *dakṣiṇā* and *dāna*, this often ran into difficulties, which were reconciled through the notion of *āpad-dharma*.

[9] The earliest punch-marked coins, which pertain to the area and period under consideration, probably symbolize the development of such exchange networks. The attempts to assign these coins to specific rulers or ruling dynasties have been by and large futile. It is likely that the coinage system(s) may have been devised by early traders to meet the requirements of expanding networks of exchange.

[10] In Buddhist literature, likewise, *śūdras* are described as possessing wealth, including grain, gold and silver (U. Chakravarti 1987: 99).

At another level, and related to the above, there was an implicit conflict amongst those controlling rival systems of exchange—each apparently attempting to extend its scope in terms of both the resources and the people involved. The growing emphasis on *dāna* for instance, suggests an attempt on the part of *brāhmaṇas* to tap resources more effectively. At the same time, the constant emphasis on generosity and hospitality as ideal qualities indicates that not as many people or as much produce as could be desired were encompassed within the network of *dāna*. At the same time, the repeated claims of *brāhmaṇas* to exemption from taxation suggest that these may have been violated in practice. Thus, *brāhmaṇas* may have been drawn into the network of tribute or taxation, although they claimed to be beyond it.

In other cases, attempts to restrict the participation of people within particular forms of exchange were challenged—production for exchange, for instance, was clearly not confined to *vaiśyas*, and was undertaken, legitimately or otherwise, by those who were classified as *brāhmaṇas* and *śūdras* as well.

Viewed from the perspective of producers, the growing importance of networks of exchange, whether ritual, political or economic, and the pressures to participate in them, probably necessitated a reordering of processes and goals of production. Besides, the specific nature and value of the resources produced for exchange would also have varied according to the relative strength of the producers and those dominating or controlling alternative systems of exchange.

I had suggested that participation in and control over exchange networks constituted one of the major bases of political power. From the preceding discussion, it will be evident that such participation and control required, in effect, an ability to cope with a dynamic and complex situation in which it was no longer possible to even attempt to channelize the entire flow of resources through a single exchange network. In such a situation, the exercise of political power and authority clearly had its limits. Those who aspired to leadership or rulership could not simply claim control over all kinds of produce or resources. Instead, they had to come to terms with those who were assuming control over alternative,

often contending, systems of exchange. It is within this context that attempts were made to structure access to political power and authority along *varṇa* lines.

III

The success in consolidating and institutionalizing power depended on the extent to which both the access of specific social categories to such power could be restricted, and on the degree to which the support of these categories could be ensured. The question of power relations in general was worked out through myths (especially later Vedic) and rituals. The attempt to resolve the problem through myths indicates that it was perceived as arising out of an earlier, pre-existing situation rather than as a novel issue. Both the later Vedic myths and rituals, moreover, focus on conflicts amongst social categories which were sought to be resolved by enforcing notions of hierarchy at a number of levels.

As we have seen, the legitimate exercise of political power was associated with *kṣatra*. The incumbents of virtually every position of status, such as the *śreṣṭha*, *adhipati*, *svarāj* and the *rājā* were conceived of as endowed with *kṣatra*, and at the same time, they were ideally expected to be *kṣatriyas* or *rājanyas*.

The distinctive characteristic of the *kṣatriya*, as emphasized in the later Vedic tradition and subsequently, was his participation in warfare. Attempts were made to ensure the acquisition of both the proper traits and success in this respect through rituals. For instance, the *aśvamedha* was expected to produce, amongst other things, an *ativyādhi rājanya* (SB 13.3.7.9), that is, a *rājanya* who excelled in killing. Besides, rituals such as the *ṛṣabha agniṣṭoma* were recommended for the *rājā* before going to battle (ApSS 22.12.11), presumably to ensure success. More generally, the *rājā* was expected to ensure victory, learn the use of the chariot and the bow and stand firm in battle (GDS 10.12–14).

This was accompanied by the denial of the rights of other social categories to the legitimate exercise of force. This culminated in the recognition of protection as the constant duty of the *kṣatriya* (GDS 10.7, VDS 3.25), implying that other members of the community

lacked the wherewithal to ensure their own protection, and hence were compelled to depend on the former. Nevertheless, this was only gradually accomplished.

Given the importance of the *brahma* and the *viś* as well as their access to sources of power, ritual-based in the case of the former and economic in the case of the latter, it is not surprizing that these categories posed a challenge to the consolidation of power by the *kṣatriya*. Each of these challenges was perceived differently within the brahmanical tradition—while the attempt of *brāhmaṇas* to assert their supremacy was recognized, that of the *viś* was denied legitimacy. Nevertheless, this perception was not necessarily valid.

The challenge posed by the *brāhmaṇas* was developed through the control asserted and probably exercised over sacral traditions, and is reflected in both myths and rituals, as well as in later prescriptive literature. The first is perhaps best typified in the conceptualization of Bṛhaspati or Brahmaṇaspati, 'an Indra-ized sacrificial deity' (Deshmukh 1933: 293). Bṛhaspati was conceived of as endowed with the *vajra* (RV 1.40.8) and was occasionally referred to as *maghavan* (ibid.: 2.24.12). Both attributes were typical of Indra. Their extension to a deity who was considered representative of the priesthood suggests a conscious attempt to create a counterpoint to Indra, the deity most commonly associated with the *rājanya* or *kṣatriya* (Dandekar 1951: 52–53). This implied that if the *rājanya* could claim access to political power through identification with Indra, so could the priest by identifying with Bṛhaspati.

A similar claim is suggested by the titles used to address the sacrificial priest, the *ṛtvij*. These included *bhūpati*, *bhuvanapati* and *mahataḥ bhūtasya pati* (BSS 3.23, ApSS 4.4.2), implying mastery or overlordship over the entire earth and its creatures. Nevertheless, the use of such titles was restricted to the sacrifice. As such, although priests may have claimed access to power in the ritual context, they were not in a position to extend this to other spheres.

At another level, as we have seen, myths equating various deities with the *brahma* and the *kṣatra* almost invariably defined their relationship in terms of either cooperation or more commonly, the superiority of the former vis-à-vis the latter. A similar relationship was developed through the *rājasūya* (SB 5.4.4.5) and *aśvamedha*

(ibid.: 13.1.5.3). Once again, these suggest an attempt to assert control on the part of the priests, which may not have been very effective in practice.[11]

A tacit recognition of such ineffectuality is provided in the notion of *rājya* being unsuitable to a *brāhmaṇa* (SB 5.1.1.12). This feeling evidently persisted, as is indicated by the provision that the *brāhmaṇa* and the *vaiśya* could take up arms only in exceptional circumstances, when the very existence of the *varṇa*-based order was threatened (e.g. VDS 3.24).

The inability of *brāhmaṇas* to participate directly and routinely in political affairs was thus acknowledged within the brahmanical tradition itself. However, if the priest could not assert total control over the *kṣatra* neither could the latter over the former. Hence, although the boundaries of the respective spheres of influence were probably challenged, the very existence of different spheres was accepted by both sides.

The contest of the *brahma* and *kṣatra* vis-à-vis the political sphere was thus within a common framework. In other words, although they were conceived of as rivals or uneasy partners, there was an underlying common definition of the issues at stake, to which both subscribed. As such, the question was more of who was to be victorious rather than what was at stake. Hence, despite tensions, a certain understanding and reconciliation of interests was possible.

The relationship of the *kṣatra* and the *viś* was characterized by a conflict of a different kind, where the very definition of the sphere and nature of power and authority appears to have been questioned. This is reflected in the conceptualization of the Maruts, who, along with the Viśvedevas, were commonly regarded as the divine counterparts of the human *viś*.

The fact that the divine *viś* was conceived of in terms of a plurality of gods, as opposed to the deities associated with *brahma* and *kṣatra*, who were characterized as individuals, points to a fundamental difference, which is obvious when one turns to their specific characteristics:

[11] In fact, the *brāhmaṇa* who probably came closest to the actual exercise of political power was the *purohita*.

> The Maruts are like brothers, among whom none is the eldest or youngest. They are equal in age, are of one mind. They also look alike with their golden mantles, golden helmets and armlets (Dandekar 1951: 150).

Thus, while the uniqueness of the other gods was constantly emphasized, it is the sameness of the Maruts which attracts attention. What is also significant is that the Maruts were considered as Indra's companions, assistants and brothers, and were regarded as one of his sources of strength. In the human context, this would indicate that, initially at least, in a relatively undifferentiated socio-political situation, the *viś* constituted a major source of both political and military support for those who aspired to positions of leadership.

However, we had noted indications that the *kṣatra-viś* relationship underwent changes during the later Vedic phase, evident in the absence of references to the human *viś* participating in military exploits. Besides, the relationship was characterized by barely concealed tension, reflected in the fears that the *viś* would desert the *kṣatra*, which were conjured away through a range of rituals, and in attempts to enforce a relationship of explicit subordination on the *viś* through similar means.[12] As suggested before, it is likely that the *viś* tried to resist attempts to deprive them of their traditional sources of power, either through actually moving beyond the sphere of influence of the leaders or rulers or through challenging them. Such attempts, though occasionally recognized ritually, met with limited success.

It is significant that in the post-Vedic prescriptive literature, the *kṣatra-viś/ vaiśya* relationship was no longer viewed as problematic. In other words, the challenge posed by the *viś*, and the alternative, less stratified conceptualization of political relationships gradually lost force. While this may have been partly owing to the strength

[12] Apart from the rituals referred to earlier, the ideal *kṣatra- viś* relationship was enforced through the *āgrāyaneṣṭi* or the offering of the first fruits (SB 2.4.3.7) and the *agnicayana* (ibid.: 6.6.1.7, 9.3.1.13). In this context, the formulae used while arranging the bricks symbolic of the *viś* were manipulated so as to ensure that the *kṣatra* was endowed with valour, while the *viś* became disunited through difference of word and thought (ibid.: 8.7.2.3). The inadvertent recognition that the strength of the *viś* lay in its unity is significant.

of the new rulers and their ability to consolidate their position, it was also probably related to the growing differences within and amongst what was defined as the *viś* and to the opening up of a range of exchange networks and the consequent economic differentiation. In such a situation, the unity and homogeneity of the *viś* which constituted the basis of its strength, both political and military, could not be extended to encompass all the people who were coming into or being brought into contact with one another. At the same time, existing bonds amongst people within each community may have been fractured as a result of increasing socio-economic differentiation. Thus, the earlier political relations could not be sustained.

The collapse of the earlier ties did not mean that the *viś* was marginalized in political terms. Apart from the implicit dependence of the rulers on the *viś* for tribute and taxes, the importance of at least some members of the *viś* was explicitly recognized. These were the *grāmaṇīs*, literally the leaders of the *grāma* whose political role has been noted.

The importance of the *grāmaṇī* was in a sense typical of the relationship between the *varṇa* order and the newly emerging political institutions. While political conflicts were frequently envisaged in *varṇa* terms, the resolution consisted, partly at least, in strengthening the bonds between the most powerful members of the first three categories—the *purohita* and the *rājā* on the one hand and the *rājā* and the *grāmaṇī* on the other, to the exclusion of the rest of those defined as *brāhmaṇas*, *rājanyas* or *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*. Thus, actual access to political power was confined to a handful of men.[13]

At the same time, a sense of identity between such men and other, less powerful individuals was fostered through emphasizing common *varṇa* affiliations. This bond probably acquired significance in a situation of socio-political differentiation—from the point of view of those who aspired to or acquired power, whether ritual, political or economic, the bond provided a basis of social

[13] The question of the *śūdra* acquiring political power is never raised during the period under consideration. This would indicate that it was not regarded as an issue of importance.

support, while for their less ambitious or less fortunate associates, the ties provided at least indirect access to power.

The development of bonds between men belonging to (or claiming to belong to) a particular *varṇa* was by no means easy and probably required systematic efforts. Unfortunately, the details of the means whereby these were effected are not available for most *varṇas*. The means by which *brāhmaṇas* attempted to establish their distinct identity are, however, discussed at length and permit an understanding of both the process and its problems.

IV

Given the social importance of the realm of the sacred, it is not surprizing that attempts were made to regulate access to and control over it as a means of consolidating the position of the priestly category. The issue was explored through myths, rituals and prescriptions. Broadly, the evidence points to a process of brahmanization. This had two related facets—on the one hand, priests or men who performed sacral functions in different communities were probably recognized as *brāhmaṇas* as opposed to the rest of the community. On the other hand, a range of sacral activities was accorded recognition within the brahmanical tradition.

While this enabled the priesthood to consolidate its authority vis-à-vis other social categories and fostered a sense of solidarity amongst those who performed priestly functions, it was not entirely free from difficulties. This is evident from the constant problem posed by alternative definitions of sacred or ritual activities, which was resolved through the virtually unending process of incorporation. Besides, there is evidence of explicit challenges as well.

The process, and the tensions generated are implicit in the discussion on the origin of the sacrificial cult within the later Vedic tradition. The sacrifice itself was an institution of undoubted antiquity. Moreover, its centrality and legitimacy were unquestioned. What was debated, however, was who had discovered the sacrifice.[14]

[14] The significance of the sacrifice was also discussed and provided the basis for a wealth of philosophical speculation.

The answers provided to the question were fairly varied at the level of myths. In one instance, the original performance of the *vājapeya* was ascribed to Bṛhaspati and Indra (SB 5.1.1.11). This was explicitly used to justify the performance of the sacrifice by a *brāhmaṇa* or a *rājanya* in the human context. The possibility envisaged in this case was one of more or less equal status vis-à-vis the cult as far as the first two *varṇas* were concerned.

Nevertheless, this was not the only possible resolution. Elsewhere (AB 7.34.1), the issue at stake was posed in terms of the ritual in general, with the *brahma* and *kṣatra* conceived of as conducting the sacrifice with their respective weapons. Needless to say, the former was supposed to have succeeded.

Despite such claims, there are indications that the control exercised by *brāhmaṇas* over the sacrifice was by no means total. This is suggested by the myth of Indra's *vajra* or thunderbolt (SB 1.2.4.1) which was supposed to have been used to construct the basic tools of the sacrifice, the wooden sword and sacrificial post. This extension of the symbolism of the *vajra*, viewed in conjunction with the frequent identification of Indra with the *rājanya*, suggests that the support of the latter was essential for the performance of the cult. As much is evident from the prescription (AB 7.34.2) requiring men of the first three *varṇas* to ask the *kṣatriya* to grant them a sacrificial site.

The ambivalent attitude towards the claims of *kṣatriyas* to the discovery and performance of the sacrifice probably reflects the tension-ridden alliance between the *brahma* and *kṣatra*. Such ambiguities are absent in the discussion of the relationship of the *viś* to the ritual as is evident from the changing treatment accorded to the Maruts in early and later Vedic mythology. In the former, they are referred to as the first performers of the sacrifice (RV 2.34.12), which would suggest an ability to initiate such activities. However, in the later Vedic tradition, they were characterized as *ahutāda* (i.e. not deserving to eat or receive oblations, SB 2.5.2.24, 4.5.2.16). If this reflects the position of the human *viś* vis-à-vis the sacrifice, it would indicate a shift from a position of control to one of exclusion. It is likely that this was related in part to the changing nature of the sacrifice itself, and the use made of the ritual to legitimize

socio-political differences. Besides, the exclusion of the *viś* from the role of defining the ritual may have been one means whereby *brāhmaṇas* could bolster their claims to status by asserting a near monopoly over definitions of the sacral context.

The treatment of other men who attempted to define the nature of the sacrifice or introduce ritual variations is illustrated by the legends of Kavaṣa Ailuṣa (AB 2.8.1) and Vatsa (PVB 14.6.6). The former was described as a *dāsīputra*, *abrāhmaṇa* and *kitava* (i.e. the son of a slave woman, a non-*brāhmaṇa* and a cheat or gambler) who 'proved' his *brahmatva* (brahmanahood) by 'seeing' the *apo-naptrīya* hymn and using it to draw the waters of the Sarasvatī to himself. The latter was condemned as a *śūdraputra* (the son of a *śūdra*) till he passed the fire ordeal through the use of the Vatsa *sāman*, named after him. Thus, the achievements of such men were appreciated, while their social origins were glossed over.

It is likely that the actual performance of any sacrifice posed the issue of control far more concretely. Two or probably three resolutions were possible. On the one hand, the sacrifice could be converted into an esoteric activity, open only to a select social category. While this may have had the advantage of ensuring exclusively brahmanical control, it also meant that the social significance of the sacrifice, which derived from the participation of a range of social categories, would have been marginalized. In other words, the very purpose of asserting control over the cult would have been defeated. Hence, although such an exclusive attitude was occasionally adopted (as in the development of the possibility of *sattras*), it was never systematized.

The second possibility was to assign and enforce distinct social roles for different social categories within the sacrificial context (and by extension, outside it as well). It was this which was most systematically explored within the brahmanical tradition, especially during the later Vedic period.

To start with, the role and nature of the priesthood was explicitly laid down. Priests were expected to perpetuate the sacrificial tradition (SB 1.5.2.7) and were regarded as guardians responsible for spreading and propagating the cult (ibid.: 1.5.1.12). Their proper qualifications were also emphasized. These included knowledge of

the sacred lore, with the learned *brāhmaṇa* being regarded as the bravest (ibid.: 4.6.6.5). At the same time, what was defined as learning and the medium of communication was standardized, *brāhmaṇas* being explicitly forbidden to use *mleccha bhāṣā* (i.e. speech which was different from Sanskrit, ibid.: 3.2.1.24). Priests were also expected to be endowed with *brahmavarcas* a less tangible quality, implying divine glory or splendour, pre-eminence in holiness or sacred knowledge, sanctity or superhuman power (SED: s.v.), which could be acquired through variations in the *soma* sacrifice (PVB 6.3.5, AB 1.1.5, SB 4.1.1.14), the *agnyādheya* (SB 2.1.3.6, BSS 2.13) and *agnihotra* (SB 2.3.1.31, ApSS 6.6.4). Very often, this was extended to an explicit (e.g. AB 8.40.1, SB 2.2.2.6, 2.4.3.14) or implicit (e.g. BSS 9.19, ADS 2.5.12.6, GDS 9.13, BDS 4.5.5, VDS 12.28–30) claim to divinity. Emphasis was also laid on proper ancestry, typified by the insistence on appointing *ārṣeya brāhmaṇas* (i.e. *brāhmaṇas* who could claim descent from men recognized as *ṛṣis* or sages) as sacrificial priests.[15]

While the role of the priest and the basis on which it could be assumed were thus codified, its implementation required the performance of the sacrifice. Attempts were made to ensure this by prescribing ritual activities as a duty for the *rājanya* and *vaiśya* (e.g. SB 2.1.3.9, 3.3.3.10, VDS 2.16, 18).[16]

The incorporation of these categories posed certain problems, reflected in the discussion on their status in the ritual context. If such men were inferior to *brāhmaṇas*, then their participation in the ritual was a potential hindrance. Yet, if they did not participate in the sacrifice, it would lose its social relevance. A way out was sought through the provision for temporary brahmanization—all

[15] The definition of ancestry often meant the exclusion of a range of less legitimate men from sacrificial activities (BSS 2.3). Ideally, the *ṛtvij* was to be the son of *brāhmaṇa* parents born after the observance of one of the recognized forms of marriage. He was also expected to be free from physical disabilities (BSS 2.3, LSS 1.1.7, ApSS 10.1.1). Occasionally, emphasis was laid on a distinctive life-style. This included eating food fit for a *brāhmaṇa* (PVB 17.1.9) and the avoidance of *surā* or liquor (GDS 23.1, VDS 20.22).

[16] There are indications that the *śūdra* may have occasionally been treated as a potential *yajamāna* (ApSS 1.19.9).

non-*brāhmaṇa yajamānas* were to be regarded as *brāhmaṇas* during the performance of the *soma* sacrifice (ApSS 10.11.6) and *aśva-medha* (SB 13.4.1.3).[17] As noted earlier, the expedient was, at best, of dubious value, as it conveyed the (possibly unintended) message that the status of the priests was not as exclusive as was portrayed.

At another level, *brāhmaṇas* attempted to use the ritual context to define their status vis-à-vis other social categories in terms of superiority and inferiority. The most outstanding example of this was provided by the treatment accorded to the *śūdra* who was explicitly designated as *ayajñiya* (PVB 6.1.11), that is, as not fit to participate in the sacrifice. In fact, the *yajamāna* who was initiated for the *soma* sacrifice was expected to avoid even talking to a *śūdra* (SB 3.1.1.10),[18] while the milk used for the daily *agnihotra* could not be milked by the *śūdra* (BSS 24.31, SSS 2.8.3, ApSS 6.3.12). Where, as in the *rājasūya*, some *śūdras* did participate in the ritual, an expiation was prescribed, presumably to undo the 'harm' caused by their presence (SB 5.3.2.2–4). Elsewhere, in the *soma* sacrifice, and in the *odana sava* (BSS 18.9), their participation was regulated to convey a message of subordination.[19] This was occasionally extended to the use of the *śūdra* or the *vṛṣala* as a scapegoat, as for instance in the *mahāvrata* (BSS 16.20, LSS 4.3.2) which included a mock battle between a *brāhmaṇa* and a *śūdra* or an *ārya* and a *śūdra*, which was to culminate in the victory of the former.

I had suggested that the use of the sacrifice to enforce social distinctions may have run into problems. In such a situation, an attempt was made to explore alternative definitions of the sacred

[17] This was extended to suggest that the murder of a *kṣatriya* or a *vaiśya* who was initiated for a sacrifice was equal to that of a *brāhmaṇa* (ADS 1.9.24.6).

[18] Occasionally, the provision was extended to the *dīkṣita* (i.e. the man initiated for a sacrifice) in general (ApSS 15.20.16). In some instances, such as the *pravargya*, seeing a *śūdra* was prohibited (ApSS 15.2.9). Conversation with *śūdras* was also forbidden as part of penances (GDS 26.8, BDS 3.8.22, VDS 24.5). Many of these provisions were applicable against women as well.

[19] In the *odana sava*, for instance, the use of vessels of gold, silver, bronze and clay was recommended for the *brāhmaṇa*, *rājanya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra* respectively. An understanding of the relative worth of the *varṇas* was thus graphically provided.

and/or appropriate existing, non-brahmanical definitions to enforce social differences. This is evident in the treatment of ritual or sacred learning, which was increasingly viewed as a substitute for the performance of the sacrifice (e.g. BDS 2.6.11.8, 10).

As in the case of the latter, attempts were made to consolidate control over ritual learning in the hands of the *brāhmaṇas*, although participation in the learning process was open to the *rājanya* and *vaiśya* (e.g. VDS 2.16, 18). If anything, the exclusion of the *śūdra* was more explicit (e.g. SB 14.1.1.31, ADS 1.3.9.9, GDS 16.19, BDS 1.11.21.17, VDS 18.12), with punishments being prescribed for those who violated the norms (GDS 12.4).

Attempts were also made to appropriate alternative definitions of the sacred such as mystical knowledge, which may have emerged from other social categories, in part as a means of challenging the *brāhmaṇas*' exclusive claims to defining the sacred. This is suggested by the frequent references to *rājās* instructing *brāhmaṇas* regarding the subject. For instance, Pravāhaṇa Jaivāli (CU 5.3.7) was thought to have taught Gautama, a *brāhmaṇa*, while Aśvapati, also a *rājā* (ibid.: 5.11.5), imparted sacred learning to five *śrotriyas*. Nevertheless, this was recognized as *pratiloma* or contrary to norms (BAU 2.1.15, Anantalakshmi 1930: 114). Besides, although *kṣatriyas* may have contributed significantly to the formulation of this tradition, its preservation and perpetuation rested in the hands of the *brāhmaṇas*.

The process of appropriation was two-fold. On the one hand, knowledge of the *ātman* or supreme soul was regarded as a definitive attribute of a true *brāhmaṇa* (BAU 3.8.10), while, on the other, the exponents of such knowledge, including *kṣatriyas* such as Janaka, were recognized as *brāhmaṇas* (SB 11.6.2.10). Perhaps the most outstanding example is provided by the case of Satyakāma Jābāla, whose mother was a slave woman and whose father was unknown. The treatment accorded to him within the brahmanical tradition is interesting. On the one hand he was 'accepted' as a *brāhmaṇa* on account of his truthfulness (CU 4.4.5) when questioned about his parentage, this being the means of appropriating the ideas and achievements of 'one of the most famous exponents of Upaniṣadic philosophy' (U.C. Sharma 1974: 193). On the other hand, he was

blacked out from the more popular versions of the brahmanical tradition which were widely disseminated:

> One does not come across any reference to his name in the Epics and Purāṇas, which is not the case with the other personalities mentioned in the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads (ibid.).

The incorporation of mystic insight within the definition of the sacred may have been more in the nature of a defensive response to a challenge to the brahmanical monopoly of defining sacrality. This, as well as the reluctant acceptance of asceticism as a possibility in the Dharma Sūtras, were thus conservative steps to preserve brahmanical claims.

At the same time, other means were adopted to actively extend the social scope of brahmanical authority, especially within the household. This included insistence on the *pañcamahāyajñas* and the brahmanization of the rites of passage. The latter process involved the incorporation of brahmanical values within ritual situations, apparent in the treatment accorded to *śūdras*. Not only were they denied the right to perform such rituals (VDS 4.3) but they could not participate even indirectly. For instance, the fire used for marriages could not be taken from the house of a *śūdra* (PGS 1.2.3, KGS 1.5.5) and the food offered by him had to be avoided by the *snātaka* who had successfully completed the period of Vedic learning (PGS 2.8.4) as well as during *śrāddhas* (ADS 2.8.18.2).

Despite attempts to impose a common notion of the sacred by *brāhmaṇas*, there is evidence that at least some groups or individuals did not accept the relevance of the sacred thus defined. These men were warned that entire *kulas* or families could be destroyed through neglect of the *yajña* or sacrifice, *vivāha* or marriage, the Vedas and *brāhmaṇas* (BDS 1.5.10.27). More generally, the atheist or *nāstika* was regarded as a *patita* (GDS 21.1) i.e. one who had fallen from the prescribed path.[20] The attempt to define the status of such men, although negatively, points to their existence.

[20] Similarly, the man who did not set up the sacrificial fire, the *anāhitāgni*, and the one who did not perform the *agnihotra* were regarded as *aśuci* or impure (BDS 2.1.2.8).

What is as significant is that at least some *brāhmaṇas* deviated from the prescribed norms as well. The range of violations is striking. Some evidently sacrificed for *śūdras* (GDS 20.1), others did not perform the *soma* sacrifice, yet others sold the Vedas instead of imparting them in the approved manner (BDS 1.5.11.34) and destroyed or did not establish the sacred fire (GDS 15.15). In other words, some *brāhmaṇas* clearly challenged what was regarded as the very basis of brahmanahood.

It is evident then, that the process of consolidating *varṇa* identity was by no means simple. Such an identity could be challenged if and when other social categories claimed access to identical attributes, such as an ability to 'discover' sacrifices. It could also be challenged if alternative definitions of such attributes were devised, as in the case of mystic insight. Thus, while both the acquisition of the attributes regarded as central to the identity in question and its acceptance by others were crucial, neither of these was achieved with any degree of finality.

It is likely that other *varṇas* may have faced similar, though not identical problems. The definition of the attributes of the ideal or typical leader or ruler, for instance, and the attempt to both arrive at and enforce certain common norms would have been important for those who were identifying themselves as *rājanyas* or *kṣatriyas*. And they were, as we have seen, challenged by others. The concerns which united (and divided) the *vaiśya* are less easy to reconstruct, but their existence can be assumed.

The means whereby social categories other than the *brāhmana* attempted to resolve such issues are unknown. Nevertheless, that such means were devised is indirectly reflected in the problems encountered by the *brāhmaṇas* in their attempt to develop and enforce uniformity vis-à-vis the sacred. It is also reflected in the range of means devised to legitimize the *varṇa*-based order as a whole, and specific elements of the hierarchy.

V

The connection between the existence of disputed claims and the need for legitimization has been explored in the context of explicitly

political institutions. That such a need was experienced in the context of *varṇa* points to a certain lack of acceptance of the institution which was countered through a range of legitimative devices. These attempted to develop a social schema[21] which reiterated a certain understanding of the nature and significance of the *varṇa* hierarchy at a number of levels. This created a sense of identity amongst men belonging to different *varṇas* which was necessary to win their allegiance to the institution of *varṇa* as a whole. At the same time, efforts were made to define and order relationships amongst the *varṇas*.

The schema which emerged was embedded in rituals and myths. What is significant is that the use of these as vehicles of the ideology of *varṇa* evidently developed in the later Vedic and post-Vedic period. At another level, *varṇa* was legitimized through abstract theorization.

Considerable emphasis was laid on the common sacral rights of the members of the first three *varṇas*. For instance, all three were eligible to perform the *agnyādheya* or the first installation of the sacrificial fire (SB 2.1.3.5) which marked the formal commencement of the ritual activities prescribed for the male householder. At another level, all could participate in rituals such as the *rājasūya* (SB 5.4.1.3–5), where they were regarded as performing an identical role by offering protection to the *yajamāna*. Besides, in sacrifices such as the *pravargya* (SB 14.2.2.30, BSS 9.11), *agniṣṭoma* (BSS 7.7) and *agnicayana* (SB 8.4.2.3–5), prayers were offered for the protection of all three categories. In general, men of the first three *varṇas* were regarded as legitimate sacrificers, donors and students of the sacred lore. This emphasis on a common access to the sacred was probably a means of ensuring allegiance to the *varṇa*-based order.

At the same time, some rituals such as the *rājasūya* (AB 8.36.4) were conceived of as a means of endowing each of the four *varṇas* with positive but distinct qualities, with the *brāhmaṇa* acquiring

[21] Kertzer (1988: 80) defines social schemas as 'abstract symbolic systems that structure our cognition of the *social* world. As with all schemas, these are important because they permit tremendous cognitive economy' (italics original).

tejas or lustre, the *kṣatriya vīrya* or valour, the *vaiśya prajāti* or procreative powers and the *śūdra pratiṣṭhā* or stability.

This was extended to the use of rituals to differentiate between and amongst *varṇas* in the *soma* sacrifice and the *agnyādheya*, where the season for its performance (BSS 24.16, ApSS 5.3.18, SSS 2.1.1–3), the chants prescribed (ApSS 5.6.3), the metres used (BSS 2.14, ApSS 5.6.2, SSS 14.33.9, 12, 15), the deities invoked (BSS 2.16, SSS 2.3.4–7) and the distance between the sacrificial fires (BSS 30.3, ApSS 5.4.3) varied according to *varṇa*.

While such variations suggested that each *varṇa* was distinct, other statements in the sacrificial context focused on the nature of the differences amongst the *varṇas*. For instance, the *dvādaśāha* or twelve-day *soma* sacrifice was thought to ensure that the *kṣatra* and the *viś* would be subservient to the *brāhmaṇa* (PVB 11.11.8, 15.6.3). Similar statements were incorporated within the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha* and in the *agnicayana* (SB 6.4.4.12–13), where a horse, goat and ass, representative of the *kṣatra* and *brahma*, the *vaiśya* and the *śūdra* respectively, were arranged so that the last-named pair was encompassed by the other two and rendered incapable of deserting the higher *varṇas*. This 'correct' order was thought to ensure that there would be no confusion between good and evil.

Attempts were also made to recreate the hierarchical order through routine domestic rituals such as the new and full moon sacrifice (SB 11.2.7.16) where the order in which the offerings were arranged was thought to ensure that the *brahma* and the *kṣatra* would be superior to the *viś*. This meant that even when large-scale sacrifices declined in importance, the values embedded in them continued to be reiterated at a different level.

This is also evident in the treatment of rites of passage such as the *upanayana*. While one of the earliest descriptions of the rite (SB 11.5.4.1–18) did not contain any discussion on *varṇa* (Ram Gopal 1983: 295–96), later prescriptions incorporated a range of *varṇa*-based variations. For instance, as in the case of the *agnyādheya*, the seasons prescribed for the *upanayana* varied according to *varṇa* (ApGS 10.4, ADS 1.1.1.19, BDS 1.2.3.11), as did the age of the boy to be initiated (AGS 1.19.1–7, SGS 2.1.1– 8, ApGS 10.2–3,

PGS 2.2.1–3, KGS 2.4.1–6, ADS 1.1.1.19, GDS 1.7, 1.13, BDS 1.2.3.8–10, VDS 11.49–51). Besides, the visible symbols of the initiate's change of status such as his girdle (AGS 1.19.12, SGS 2.1.15–17, PGS 2.5.21–24, ADS 1.1.2.33–37, GDS 1.17, BDS 1.2.3.14, VDS 11.58–60), his upper and lower garment (AGS 1.19.10, 11, PGS 2.5.17–19, ADS 1.1.3.1–7, GDS 1.18–23, BDS 1.2.3.15, VDS 11.61–63) and the wooden staff (PGS 2.5.25–28, GDS 1.28, BDS 1.2.3.16, VDS 11.55–58) were supposed to vary according to *varṇa*. *Varṇa*-based variations were occasionally introduced into other rites of passage such as the *cūḍa-karman* or the first cutting of a boy's hair (SGS 1.28.1–4) and marriage (BDS 1.11.20.12). The periods of impurity following death (GDS 14.1–4) and birth (VDS 4.27–30) were also thought to vary according to *varṇa*, with *brāhmaṇas* being 'purified' more rapidly than others.

The 'proper' *varṇa* hierarchy was also ensured through the ordering of hospitality. The most prestigious offerings of *madhuparka* and *arghya* were restricted to *brāhmaṇas* such as the *ācārya* or preceptor and the *ṛtvij* or sacrificial priest, the *rājā* and selected kinsmen (ApGS 13.19, PGS 1.3.1, VDS 11.2). The daily offering of food was also prescribed along *varṇa* lines (GDS 5.44, BDS 2.3.5.15, VDS 11.5–6), with the *brāhmaṇa* being served first, while the *śūdra* was to be fed last, occasionally after he had performed some work (BDS 2.3.5.14). Such prescriptions sought to extend the notion of *varṇa* into day-to-day social intercourse.[22]

At another level, attempts were made to legitimize the *varṇa* hierarchy through the reiteration and development of myths. Not all myths which discussed the origin of social categories conceived of their relationship as hierarchical. In one instance (BAU 1.4.11–14), Brahmā was thought to have created *kṣatra*, symbolized by Indra, Varuṇa, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya, Yama, Mṛtyu and Iṣāna amongst the deities in order to strengthen himself. This apparently did not prove adequate. Hence he created the *viś* with the Vasus, Rudras, Ādityas, Viśvedevas and Maruts amongst the deities. As even this was not sufficient, he created the *śūdra* and Pūṣan. Ulti-

[22] Gestures and words used during salutation were also expected to vary according to *varṇa* (ADS 1.2.5.16, 1.4.14.25, GDS 6.10, 11).

mately, *dharma* was created to maintain the entire order. This understanding focused on the undisguised dependence of the higher *varṇas* on the lower ones. Besides, it did not attempt to assert the superiority of the higher *varṇas* vis-à-vis the rest.

However, the range of mythical possibilities was gradually reduced, and what was reiterated most consistently were variations on the Puruṣasūkta (e.g. PVB 6.1.6–11, BDS 1.10.18.2, VDS 4.2) which defined the relationship amongst the *varṇas* in terms of superordination and subordination. Occasionally, the supposed order and nature of the divine creation was explicitly linked to what were regarded as the ideal attributes of each *varṇa*. For instance, Brahmā himself was conceived of as endowing the four *varṇas* with the qualities which would enable them to perform their prescribed functions (BDS 1.10.18.2–5). Thus, the ideal social order was viewed as being of divine origin.

Perhaps more significant in the long run were attempts to justify social inequalities in general and the *varṇa*-based order in particular on the basis of the theory of *karma*. In one of the earliest of such attempts (CU 5.10.7), the status of a man at birth was accepted and explained in terms of previous actions. As an extension of this, rebirth depended on present or future acts. If these were good, a man was assured of rebirth as a *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya* or *vaiśya*, while if these were bad, he would be reborn as a dog, pig or *cāṇḍāla*. More generally, men were assured of progressing or regressing up and down the *varṇa* scale according to their conduct in preceding and succeeding births (ADS 2.5.11.10–11, GDS 11.31--32).

The development of the theory of *karma* marked a shift in the focus of explanation or justification. While the earlier myths and rituals dealt with the existence of social categories and their significance, *karma* implied that their existence could be or was taken for granted. What was considered worth explaining was the status of individual men. The offering of an explanation or justification in individualistic terms probably meant that the appeal of the theory could be more direct or immediate, permitting an identification which may have been less easy to ensure through myths which focused on relatively abstract social categories. It is this which probably explained the long- standing justificatory value of *karma*.

We had noted how maintaining some elements of the *varṇa* hierarchy was recognized as a part of the duty of the *rājā* (GDS 11.9). To the extent that this was enforced it would have led to the consolidation and maintenance of *varṇa*-based norms.

Despite efforts to enforce the *varṇa* hierarchy, there are indications that it was challenged. This is evident from references to men who did not perform the *upanayana* (ADS 1.1.2.6, VDS 11.75). Although such men were condemned, their existence would indicate a certain amount of resistance to incorporation within the emerging social order. A degree of hostility is also evident in the characterization of the typical *śūdra* (VDS 6.24) as one who bears grudges, is envious, speaks untruths, speaks evil of *brāhmaṇas*, is prone to back-biting and is cruel. These attributes contrast sharply with the ideal qualities of servitude and suggest that the attempt to structure social relations along *varṇa* lines may have met with only limited success.

The wide-ranging attempts to establish the legitimacy of the *varṇa* order and the continued existence of a certain degree of opposition to it suggest that the institutionalization of socio- political, and probably economic, relationships was not a smooth, simple process. Given the fact that there were other attempts to institutionalize such relationships on other bases such as *deśa*, *kula* and *jāti*, it is obvious that the social context within which *rājya* emerged was complex.

Such complexities would have affected the development of *rājya* in a number of ways. On the one hand, claims to and the consolidation of attributes of specific social categories delimited the area within which the *rājā* could intervene effectively. An example of this is provided by the development of alternative systems of exchange, which meant that it was impossible to channelize the flow of exchange. This meant that the exercise of political power was shared, for all practical purposes, although this did not mean that all those who wielded power did so in an identical fashion. The differences are obvious if one compares the role of the *purohita* with that of the *grāmaṇī* or the *rājā*, for instance.

At the same time, the growing complexity of the social situation permitted the *rājā* to consolidate his position to a degree which

would probably not have been possible in a less stratified context. In effect, the *rājā*'s social position emerged as a unique, virtually indispensable one, typified in the notion of him as the protector of the social order.

The need for such protection was probably acutely felt by at least some social categories which had acquired access to a certain amount of power, but which, at the same time, were vulnerable to challenges from other social categories and to conflicts amongst their own members regarding the basis on which such power was to be exercised or shared. The discussion on the sacred within the brahmanical tradition, as well as the attempts to legitimize the *varṇa*-based order exemplify some of these problems and their attempted resolution. As noted above, the evidence indicates that these efforts were not entirely successful. Such a situation permitted the *rājā* to broaden the range of his influence through the extension or withholding of support to one or other of the contending parties. At the same time, the *rājā* himself probably emerged stronger by supporting those who were relatively more powerful. In other words, the consolidation of *rājya* depended on the ability of the *rājā* to ally himself with what were emerging as the dominant social categories. At another level, the alliance between the *rājā* and these categories was intrinsically linked with fundamental changes within the kinship structure and the organization of the household, to which we will now turn.

Chapter Eight

The Context of Rājya (II): Towards Gārhasthya

(There are four *āśramas*, those of the) *brahmacārin*, *gṛhastha*, *bhikṣu*, and *vaikhānasa*. Of them, the *gṛhastha* is the womb, owing to the unproductiveness of the others.

Gautama Dharma Sūtra.

I

The attempt of the *rājā* to consolidate his position in relation to the social categories which were emerging was interwoven with related changes at another level, that of the kinship structure and the household. As in the case of the social changes examined earlier, these were influenced by and in turn influenced specific elements of the definition of *rājya*.

A range of kinship ties and householding patterns, probably specific to different communities was gradually reduced to a single norm, centring around the *gṛha*. Simultaneously, relations within the *gṛha* were structured along hierarchical, patriarchal lines. As in the case of *varṇa*, this was by no means a simple, unilineal process, and had loose ends and persisting problems of dissidence or disruption.

The implications of the emergence of a single form of the household to the exclusion or subordination of other patterns were manifold. At one level, the development of a single household pattern was useful in political terms as this rendered the exercise of power and control relatively easy, necessitating as it did the formulation of a more or less uniform policy towards all households. This in itself was simpler than evolving distinct policies or norms, which would have been required if different household patterns continued to exist.

At another level, access to the produce of the household provided possibly the most important source of economic support for the *rājā*. However, the development of this particular relationship rested both on the ability and the felt need of the householder to produce in order to meet the demands of the *rājā* and his associates including the priesthood, and on the creation of mechanisms for siphoning off the produce. I will focus on the attempts made by the male householder or *gṛhapati* to control both the productive and the reproductive or procreative resources within the household and the process whereby this assertion of control was connected with the ability to participate in systems of exchange, economic, political and ritual, outlined earlier, as well as on the implications of such participation.

The location of the process of socialization within what emerged as the dominant form of the household is also significant. This permitted the introduction, reiteration and consolidation of the values and norms which legitimized the emerging political structure amongst other things.

While the issue of the nature of household units and kinship ties was explored through myth, rituals and prescriptions, as was that of procreation, other problems, such as that of the control and distribution of household produce and the development of the household as the locus of a particular form of socialization were developed more systematically through rituals. As in other instances, I suggest that the differences in sources reflect developments over time, with relatively novel issues being handled through rituals, whereas those which were perceived as emerging from a pre-existing situation were discussed in myths.

II

In most known societies, the household unites the core of the kin group who share a common residence, which often provides the locale for certain crucial activities. However, not all members of the unit necessarily participate in these activities in an identical fashion. Besides, both the form and content of household relations evolve historically.

The early Vedic tradition is remarkable for the wealth of terms used to designate the basic household unit. These included the *duroṇa* (RV 3.1.18), *kṣiti* (ibid.: 5.37.4), *okas* (ibid.: 8.33.2), *kṣaya* (ibid.: 9.9.2), *niveśa* (ibid.: 9.69.7), *dam* or *dama* (ibid.: 2.1.2), *pastya* (ibid.: 4.1.11), *asta* (ibid.: 10.95.2), *gaya* (ibid.: 5.10.3), *sadas* (ibid.: 9.107.7) and *gṛha* (ibid.: 3.53.6).

While the exact significance of each of these words is difficult to determine, the very existence of a range of terms is probably indicative of a variety of forms of household organization. This is corroborated when one examines the possible derivations of some of the terms. For instance, *kṣiti* or *kṣaya*,[1] was derived from the root *kṣi* meaning to dwell, rule or destroy (Upadhyay 1967: 46), *dam* or *dama* probably originated from the Indo-European root *dem* meaning to build (IED: s.v) or from the root *dam* meaning to control (Basu 1925: 111–12), *gaya* referred to both the household and its contents, including wealth (SED: s.v., VI: s.v.), the *duroṇa* was probably a house distinguished by a gateway (Sarkar 1985: 4), while the *pastya* may have provided accomodation to humans and beasts (ibid.: 6).

The term *gṛha*, which later becomes synonymous with the house or household, is but one amongst a number of others used in the *Ṛg Veda*. Of the ninety-two occurrences of the various forms of the word in the text, only thirty-four occur in the relatively early 'family books' (R.S. Sharma 1983a: 55). While this has been used to argue that family life was not important in early Vedic society (ibid.), I would suggest that it is the relative unimportance of the *gṛha* in particular which is indicated, and that family life may have been structured in and around other forms of the household.

Another significant feature is that some of the terms underwent a semantic transformation in the later Vedic and post-Vedic tradition. For instance, the word *kṣaya* acquires the meaning of destruction, whereas *asta* was used in the sense of setting (of the sun, for example), while connotations of a dwelling place are rarely suggested. It is likely that this points to lack of familiarity with certain

[1] The latter word occurs over seventy-two times in the *Ṛg Veda* and means house or dwelling (Upadhyay 1967: 46).

earlier patterns of household organization, which may have gradually succumbed to the process of socio-political change.

Initially, however, at least some of these units were regarded as more or less equivalent. This is evident from the conceptualization of the abodes of deities, which include the *kṣaya* (RV 3.2.6,) *dama* (ibid.: 3.10.2, 10.167. 4) and *pastya* (ibid.: 4.55.3). Besides, almost identical prayers focused on either obtaining or ensuring the protection of household units such as the *kṣiti* (RV 8.84.6), *kṣaya* (ibid.: 2.11.14), *okas* (ibid.: 7.56.24), *dama* (ibid.: 2.1.7), *gaya* (ibid.: 10.66.3) and *duroṇa* (ibid.: 10.120.7).

At another level, the beginnings of the notion of controlling such units are discernible. This is reflected in the use of the suffix *pati* to form epithets such as *dampatī* and *gṛhapati*. Of these, the former was relatively rare; the latter, on the other hand, was a typical epithet of Agni in the *Ṛg Veda* (Griswold 1971: 154) and subsequently (e.g. AB 1.3.5, SSS 1.15.2, ApSS 6.13.2).[2] Besides, it was occasionally extended to Indra (SB 3.4.2.15), and Prajāpati (PVB 10.3.6) in the later brahmanical tradition.[3]

Equally significant was the growing emphasis on the position of the human *gṛhapati* who was often equated with his divine counterparts (e.g. SB 3.4.2.15) and whose association with and control over the *gṛha* was reiterated through the daily *agnihotra* (BSS 3.8) and the new and full moon sacrifice (ApSS 1.10.3). There is thus a tendency to both define household relations in terms of control and to locate such relations within the *gṛha*, to the virtual exclusion of other types of household organization.

The working out of these relationships involved the transformation of kinship ties between men and women on the one hand, and amongst men on the other. Variations in sexual relations which probably reflected the practices of different communities or social

[2] One of the few goddesses referred to as a *gṛhapatnī* was Sūryā (RV 10.85.26). However, this epithet was rather unusual for both goddesses and women.

[3] The absence of the use of the epithet for Varuṇa and Soma is striking. This would indicate that the early *rājā* was less closely associated with the control of this particular form of the household. However, the human *rājā* in the later Vedic period and subsequently, was closely connected with the concerns of the *gṛha*.

categories were gradually ordered hierarchically, with the ideal *pati-patnī* relationship being developed at length; kinswomen other than the wife were accorded marginal importance, and while inter-generational ties amongst men were recognized, intra-generational ties were thrust into the background.

To start with heterosexual relations, early Vedic mythology, including incidental references, throws light on a range of possibilities which diverge significantly from what later emerged as the ideal *pati-patnī* relationship. For instance, divine pairs such as Dyaus and Pṛthivī, the heaven and earth respectively were conceived of as mothers, or father and mother (e.g. RV 3.1.7, 5.43.2), but not explicitly as *pati* and *patnī* or *jāyā*. Other possibilities envisaged included incestuous relationships, such as that between Pūṣan and his mother (ibid.: 6.55.5) and Prajāpati and Uṣas (ibid.: 5.42.13). Apart from the first union referred to above, the others were not explicitly recognized as permanent or procreative.

Such conceptualizations suggest that temporary heterosexual unions, not necessarily procreative, were envisaged as both possible and acceptable. This is also reflected in analogies which compare deities and their invokers to the lover and beloved. For instance, a chanter invoking Indra was compared to a *marya* (young man) thinking about his *yoṣā* or woman (RV 4.20.5). Elsewhere (ibid.: 3.62.8), Indra was compared to the *vadhūyu* (a wooer, suitor, or bridegroom, SED: s.v.), while the invoker was regarded as the woman or *yoṣanā*. Similarly, Soma was described as coming to men like a *jāra* or lover to his *yoṣā* (ibid.: 9.38.4).[4]

Perhaps as significant was the relatively egalitarian roles envisaged for men and women in such unions, evident from the analogy comparing the fingers pressing *soma* to a *kanyā* or maiden greeting her *jāra* (RV 9.56.3). Elsewhere (ibid.: 10.40.2), the invokers attempting to attract the Aśvins were compared to a *yoṣā* attracting a *marya*. In other words, such unions could evidently be initiated by interested individuals of either sex.

While it is unclear whether the unions referred to above existed

[4] Terms such as *marya*, *jāra*, *vara*, *vadhūyu*, etc, could be used to denote either the lover or the bridegroom (Karve 1939: 118).

within the context of a household, there are indications that somewhat similar bonds, such as that between the *dampatī* (dual) were forged in such a context. The *dampatī* referred to the husband and wife (R.S. Sharma 1983a: 28) who jointly shared control of the *dama*. Their ideal relationship was reflected in prayers to make the *dampatī* of one mind (*samanasā*, RV 5.3.2, 8.31.5). In other words, the emphasis was on equality or consensus rather than on dominance and subservience between partners. What is also significant is that both sons and daughters were desired within the *dama* (RV 8.31.8).

These possibilities were not, however, accorded recognition within the later brahmanical tradition. While none of them was explicitly condemned, the treatment accorded to the relationship of *jāmitva* is probably indicative of the attitude towards such unions. *Jāmitva* implied a close bond, which was evidently viewed as desirable (RV 10.64.13). It also stood for the brother-sister tie and may have included an obligation to marry (Karve 1939: 109). However, in the later Vedic period and subsequently, the relationship was viewed with increasing disfavour.

Conflicting notions of *jāmitva* reflecting a situation of transition, are typified in the famous dialogue between Yama and Yamī (RV 10.10), the primeval twins. Yamī was conceived of as desiring sexual union on the basis of *jāmitva*, whereas Yama was thought to deny the possibility, on the ground of their similarity and virtual identity. While this has been viewed as a discussion on and condemnation of incest, it is possible that the union was regarded with increasing disfavour on account of the absolute equality of the partners. This is also suggested by the treatment of *jāmitva* in the later Vedic ritual context, where constant efforts were made to avoid pairing similar objects or verses or metres (e.g. LSS 6.9.8), such unions being regarded as unproductive on account of the sameness of the partners. At another level, some of the terms referred to above, such as *jāra*, were later regarded as terms of abuse (Karve 1939: 119).

At the same time, heterosexual relationships were increasingly structured in terms of the *pati-patnī/jāyā* bond which was construed as one of superordination and subordination. This is suggested, for

instance, in the analogy comparing the fingers used to press *soma* for Indra with *patnīs* serving a *pati* (RV 1.62.11). The *pati-patnī* bond was probably privileged because it permitted the consolidation of ritual and political power within the household in the hands of a single man, the *gṛhapati*.

The political significance of the *pati-patnī* relationship as an ideal or a norm cannot be overestimated. The introduction and standardization of values of dominance and subordination, and the power attributed to or claimed by the *gṛhapati*, in a sense facilitated the task of those who were attempting to penetrate within and control some aspects of domestic life—priests and men who aspired to positions of status, as they could negotiate with a single powerful man instead of with a less closely structured and hence probably less 'manageable' domestic unit. As such, the *pati-patnī* relationship was accorded a recognition which was not available to other types of unions. From the perspective of the *pati* too, it is likely that the development and maintenance of inegalitarian relationships within the household may have posed problems. In such a situation, the possibility of buttressing his position through external support probably assumed greater importance, providing the basis for an intermeshing of various networks of power and authority.

The working out of the *pati-patnī* relationship was accompanied by the marginalization of other, non-sexual relations between men and women, including that with mothers. On the mythical plane, while a number of goddesses such as the Āpaḥ (RV 1.23.16), Aditi (ibid.: 1.89.10), the Heaven and Earth (ibid.: 3.1.7), Night and Day (ibid.: 1.142.7), Uṣas (ibid.: 7.81.4) and divinized rivers such as the Vipāśā, Śutudrī (ibid.: 3.33.3) and Sarasvatī (ibid.: 2.41.6), were characterized as mothers in the early Vedic tradition, this was not explored or reinforced subsequently.

The treatment of the brother-sister bond was somewhat similar. While some goddesses such as the Āpaḥ (RV 9.82.3), Uṣas (ibid.: 1.123.5) and Sinīvālī (ibid.: 2.32.6) were conceived of as sisters of the gods, men rarely appealed to them as sisters.

On the human plane, the shift in the terminology used to designate the sister reflects a transformation of the bond. It is likely that initially, the brother-sister bond was especially close, with the

brother or *bhrātṛ* being defined in relation to the sister or *svasṛ* (Shastri 1949: 260). The first term was probably derived from the Indo-European root *bhar* or *bher* meaning to bear, protect or support (IED: s.v.), whereas *svasṛ* is traceable to the root *seve* and was in all likelihood related to the Sanskrit root *sva* (self) or *svīya* (one's own) (Ghurye 1962: 26). Thus, 'the brother appears as the supporter or helper of his sister and the sister figures as his own relative par excellence' (ibid.).

In the later Vedic tradition and subsequently, the term *svasṛ* was replaced by *bhaginī*. The latter term is commonly explained as one who is fortunate in having a brother but it also means one who has a vagina (*bhaga*) (Gonda 1975ii: 431), emphasizing the sexual attributes of the woman which at once rendered her attractive and dangerous from the point of view of the brother in an exogamous system and constituted her value in a system of exchange of women by men in such a situation. It was probably this understanding which is reflected in the growing hostility towards the daughter as well (AB 7.33.1).

The structuring of ties between kinsmen and women in the context of *gārhasthya* thus meant an ordering of sexual and procreative bonds, with a marked preference for such forms as were male-dominated. Related to this, kinswomen who could not be incorporated within such bonds were marginalized. In other words, the relationship between kinsmen and women was becoming increasingly differentiated, with the former attempting to assume control over and directing the form and content of the relationship.

If the relations between men and women were increasingly governed by concerns of control over procreation, those between men were structured around the issue of control over other resources as well. As mentioned earlier, the development of relationships amongst kinsmen was characterized by the strengthening of intergenerational bonds amongst men, typified by the father-son bond in particular. On the mythical plane, this was reflected in the conceptualization of the most important deities, such as Indra (RV 4.17.17) and Agni (ibid.: 6.1.5) as fathers.

Analogies indicate that the father was expected to offer protection (SGS 1.25.7) and impart wisdom (RV 7.32.26), being obeyed

in return (ibid.: 1.68.5). Besides, although the father-son bond was not one of equality, it implied reciprocity.[5] Thus, the son was expected to support and strengthen the father (RV 1.30.1) just as the father supported him.

As in the case of the *pati-patnī* relationship, the father- son bond was worked out and strengthened through myths and rituals, including those involving the *pitṛs*. The notion of the *pitṛs* was developed and elaborated during the period under consideration. Of the forty-eight occurrences of the term in the *Ṛg Veda*, as many as twenty-four are found in the relatively late tenth *maṇḍala* (M. Chakravarti 1969: 159). Besides, while the term may have initially denoted ancestors in general, it was gradually refined to specify the *pitṛ*, *pitāmaha* and *prapitāmaha* (father, patrilineal grandfather and great-grandfather respectively, Karve 1938: 74).

As opposed to inter-generational ties, the bonds amongst other kinsfolk were accorded less importance in some instances, and positively denied in others. The bonds which were regarded as unimportant included matrilateral ties amongst *sanābhas* and *sodaryas* (GDS 28.26), that is, those sharing a common navel and womb respectively. The position of the *jñātis*, literally those who were well-known (Karve 1939: 144), was somewhat similar. It is likely that ties with the *jñāti* were particularly important for women, hence, during the *varuṇapraghāsa* they were threatened with the destruction of these kinsfolk in case they had lovers and did not tell the truth (e.g. BSS 5.7).[6] The marginalization of such ties was reflected in the virtual absence of attempts to identify deities as *sanābhas*, *sodaryas* or *jñātis* as well as in the absence of rituals or prescriptions to strengthen the bonds amongst them.

[5] As an extension of this, the father-son tie was often conceived of as reversible, both in myths such as that of Agni and the sacrificer (RV 5.3.10) where the former was thought to be produced by the latter and in turn produced him, and in rituals such as the *rājasūya*. This conceptualization conveyed a sense of continuity from one generation to the next.

[6] The association of *jñātis* with women was also suggested during the marriage ritual (SGS 1.9.9) which included a prayer to Pūṣan to ensure that the bridegroom became *jñātimat*, that is, possessed of *jñātis*, through the father, mother and brothers of his bride. Women probably had some claims to the wealth of the *jñāti*, which was later denied (ADS 2.6.14.9–10).

The fate of the bonds amongst other kinsfolk was more or less similar. These included the *bandhus*, a term derived from the root *bandh* meaning to bind (Karve 1939: 142) and probably referring to both uterine and marital as well as paternal kinsfolk, the *āpis*, literally those who were near (ibid.: 144) and the *sajātas*, that is, those who shared a common birth. While gods were occasionally identified in terms of such relationships(RV 8.21.4, 8.73.12), these associations were not developed further.[7]

The treatment of such kinfolk extended to the relationship envisaged amongst brothers. Although gods were occasionally identified as brothers (e.g, RV 6.59.2, 2.1.9, etc.), no attempts were made to strengthen such ties through rituals. Besides, kinsmen belonging to the same generation as the *yajamānal gṛhapati*, the *bhrātṛvya* and *sapatna*, were viewed as positively hostile.

I had suggested that the focus on patriliny permitted the concentration of power and resources by restricting potential contenders and claimants as sons could look forward to gaining their fathers' positions. As opposed to this, close bonding amongst men of the same generation could be maintained through a sharing of resources and power, but such bonds were considered less important. Besides, just as those aspiring to establish gender stratification were assured of support, so also were those who aspired to enforce patrilineal control assured of receiving political and ritual support, for similar reasons.

Although ties amongst kinsfolk belonging to the same generation were not reinforced, many of these were allowed to persist. This points to the continued importance of bilateral ties, typical of a clan organization. It has been suggested that although contradic-

[7] The treatment of *sakhya*, friendship or companionship, was somewhat similar. Deities were frequently conceived of in terms of *sakhya* in the Vedic tradition (e.g. RV 9.31.6, 10.6.2, etc). The relationship amongst *sakhās* of the opposite sex could extend beyond friendship. This is evident from the Yama-Yamī dialogue (ibid.: 10.10.1) where the latter was portrayed as hoping to obtain a grandson for her father through *sakhya* with her *sakhā*, Yama. Even in the marriage ritual, the seventh step of the *saptapadī* was to be taken for *sakhya* (Patyal 1975: 107). However, *sakhya* did not attain centrality within the brahmanical tradition.

tory, clan and lineage-type bonds frequently co-exist owing to the fact that while 'the latter may serve as instruments of ranking and stratification tending to produce a society of potentially hostile socio-economic class segments, . . . the clan may operate to cross cut class lines, thus discouraging incipient class conflict' (Fried 1967: 126).

In other words, their continued existence permitted the regulation of open conflicts and as such was politically beneficial.

III

The consolidation of the particular household order and kinship structure dominated by the *gṛhapati* was manifested concretely in his assertion of control over the productive resources and produce associated with the household, as well as with their distribution. This was achieved through the development of relationships of control within the household, which were reinforced through connections with and the support of the new extra-domestic sources of power and authority which were being consolidated virtually simultaneously.

The crystallization of these relationships took place in the context of what may be broadly defined as a situation of economic expansion, characterized by the growing importance of settled agriculture, which was probably intrinsically linked to an increase in population.

It has been suggested (Stanley 1981: 301, Ember 1983: 292) that the shift to settled agriculture results in a dramatic increase in population owing to more certain food supplies, the greater fertility of women and the demand for labour. This increase in population in turn generates further resources for agricultural expansion. In situations where relatively simple agricultural technology is employed, labour is possibly one of the most important means of production (Meillassoux 1978: 323). Given the limited use of iron tools for agriculture, mentioned earlier, it is not surprizing that the control over procreative processes, which could generate additional labour resources, acquired significance.

The control of procreation necessitated, in concrete terms, the

control of women.[8] This was attempted through the reduction and specification of the roles open to them vis-à-vis material resources on the one hand, and through efforts to enforce a definition of procreation which viewed women as merely instrumental. At another level, the possibilities denied to women were extended to others. These included access to and control over material resources, typified by an ability to legitimately transfer them on a range of occasions.

The issue of control over material resources was explored in early Vedic mythology, with reference to deities such as Indra, Agni, Varuṇa and Soma. Of this entire range of possibilities, those associated with Indra and Agni were extended systematically to the realm of the household through the identification of the *gṛhapatil yajamāna* with these deities. The possibilities which were thus reinforced were those which focused on the control over resources by a single man, and their conditional distribution.[9]

As opposed to this, there is a sharp dichotomy between the roles conceived for goddesses in the early Vedic tradition and those envisaged for women in the later Vedic context and subsequently. Initially, some goddesses were conceived of as generating resources. For instance, Uṣas (RV 4.52.3) and Ilā (ibid.: 5.41.19) were regarded as mothers of cattle or the herd. At another level, they were identified with resources, with Sarasvatī visualized as being full of milk and water (ibid.: 7.36.6), while Pṛṣṇī or the mother of the Maruts was equated with the cow (ibid.: 8.94.1). Besides, like the gods, they were conceived of as distributing resources as well,

[8] As Gailey (1987: x–xi) observes: 'Women symbolize the ability of kin communities to control their own reproduction. In their dual capacity, as both producers of subsistence goods and reproducers of kinspeople, women become the focus of attempts to reduce their relative authority and autonomy', in a situation of state formation, where, from the point of view of those aspiring to state control, there is a need to ensure production to facilitate the collection of tribute or taxes, as opposed to production for subsistence, which is the common goal of kin-based societies.

[9] The crucial role of the *gṛhapati* in productive processes, related to his control over the means of production, is also attested to in Buddhist sources (U. Chakravarti 1987).

with Uṣas being commonly described as *maghonī* or generous[10] (ibid.: 3.61.1) and being invoked by those who desired *rayi* or wealth (ibid.: 4.51.10), Sarasvatī was characterized as a giver of *ratnas* or jewels (ibid.: 1.164.49), the waters or Āpaḥ were conceived of as conferring the *rasa* or essence (ibid.: 10.9.2), while the *oṣadhis* or plants were thought to provide horses, cattle and cloth (ibid.: 10.97.4).

If the attributes of the goddesses reflect parallels envisaged in the human context, it is evident that the possibility of women generating and distributing produce or productive resources was recognized at least amongst some communities. However, this was not legitimized or reinforced through rituals or prescriptions. More important, myths and rituals developed the notion of legitimately dispossessing goddesses, and, by explicit extension, women. I had referred earlier to the battle between Indra and Uṣas as well as to the structuring of gender relations through the *soma* sacrifice, which justified debarring women from an inheritance. Such possibilities were also explored in the conceptualization of the *nakṣatras* (feminine) or asterisms which were initially conceived of as possessing *ṛddhi* or prosperity (PVB 23.23.2) but were later defined as literally *na-kṣatra* (i.e. devoid of *kṣatra*, SB 2.1.2.18).[11] In other words, the importance of goddesses was negated to exclude (kins) women from what were defined as the resources of the household.

In fact, in the human context, women were increasingly defined as part of the resources of the household, typified in the gifting of women in general and daughters in particular, especially in marriage. This was recognized as a possibility in both the early and the later Vedic tradition. In the former, the gifting of women is referred to as the giving of *vadhūs*, a term commonly used for the bride (RV 6.27.8, 8.19.36).[12] Later Vedic tradition records the gifting of

[10] This is the feminine form of *maghavan*, Indra's characteristic epithet.

[11] At another level, while prayers were offered to the *pitṛs* or male patrilineal ancestors, to obtain wealth (e.g. RV 10.15.11), the *mātṛs* or maternal ancestors were never similarly invoked.

[12] The term *vadhū* was probably derived from the root *vah*, meaning to carry (VI: s.v.), emphasizing the fact that the bride was carried away from her father's house to her husband's (Karve 1939: 123).

daughters by *rājās* as a means of winning over sages (SB 4.1.5.7, CU 4.2.5). More generally, such gifts were prescribed in the context of the *soma* sacrifice (ASS 5.13.17) and in marriage (ADS 2.5.11.17, 19, VDS 29.18). Besides, women were enumerated among items of property, including animals and land (GDS 12.36, VDS 3.16) and consequently considered dependent throughout their lives (BDS 2.2.3.46, VDS 5.3).

The recognition of women as subhuman resources which were useful in procreation was accompanied by the conceptualization of heterosexual intercourse as an occasion for establishing relationships of dominance and subordination (BAU 6.4.2), with provisions for cajoling and coercing the woman through purchase or the use of force (ibid.: 6.4.8).[13] At another level, the procreative process was elaborated almost endlessly, reflected, for instance, in the variety of sacrifices ranging from the daily *agnihotra* (e.g. SB 2.2.4.7, BSS 3.7, SSS 2.14.2) prescribed for the average householder to the more elaborate *vājapeya*, *aśvamedha* and *rājasūya*, which were prescribed as a means of obtaining progeny in general and sons in particular.[14]

The use of the sacrifice as a procreative device recognized the *yajamāna* as *prajākāma* (i.e. desirous of obtaining progeny). This contrasted with early Vedic prayers for offspring for an undifferentiated 'us' (e.g. RV 4.50.6, 4.36.9) or for the household unit such as the *kṣaya* (ibid.: 9.97.6) or *gṛha* (ibid.: 8.31.4). The assertion of the claims of the *yajamāna* over reproduction was probably two-fold —on the one hand it was an assertion of the authority of men as opposed to women and on the other it suggests a tendency to recognize individual men as dominant within the household, as opposed to the more generalized forms of control which probably prevailed earlier.

Second, the devices employed in the ritual to ensure procreation included variations on the *mithuna*, conceived of as pairs of mas-

[13] Assertion of male control is also evident from the fact that men were expected to use chants and take the initiative in sexual intercourse (ibid.: 6.4.20,21).

[14] The prescriptions for obtaining daughters were few and far between. Occasionally the term *prajā* or offspring was viewed as a synonym for *putra* or son (ApSS 5.26.3).

culine and feminine objects or ideas used in basic rituals such as the *agnihotra* (SB 11.3.2.1) and the new and full moon sacrifice (ibid.: 11.1.2.6). This emphasized the instrumentality of the wife in the procreative process. This was also ensured through the symbolic enactment of heterosexual intercourse. For instance, water was poured into the folded hands of the sacrificer's wife during the *agnihotra*, to ensure the birth of offspring (SSS 2.10.5,6) while she was expected to place sacred grass between her thighs (SSS 1.15.13–14) or on her navel (ASS 1.11.2) during the new and full moon sacrifice for a similar purpose. While this implied a certain recognition of the procreative role of the wife, the context, controlled and ritualized by the sacrificer and the priesthood, meant, in effect, that women were denied control over the process. This is also reflected in the legend of Manu (SB 1.8.1.7–11) who was conceived of as obtaining a daughter named Ilā from the sacrifice, and using her as a sacrificial offering in order to obtain offspring.

The elaboration of the procreative process is also evident in the development of other 'means' of reproduction to which women were denied access. These included knowledge of various kinds—of the significance of rituals (e.g. SSS 10.14.8, 10.15.8, 16.23.6), and mystic insight, or knowledge of particular texts (e.g. AA 3.2.15, CU 1.5.2, BAU 5.13.1).

The ritualization of procreation is also evident in rites of passage such as marriage (RV 10.85.45, AGS 1.7.6, ApGS 6.11, SGS 1.16.8,11), where prayers were offered to ensure that the bride produced sons, and in the rituals associated with pregnancy such as the *puṃsavana* (ApGS 14.9) and the *sīmantonnayana* (ibid.: 14.1). Given the dominant role assigned to the husband or priest on such occasions, the notion of the male as determining or controlling procreation would have been strengthened.

In this situation, obtaining offspring was viewed as the outcome of a two- or three-fold process—physical, ritual and spiritual. While both men and women had more or less equal access to the first, the second and third were male-dominated. Given their access to such 'means' of reproduction the role of men in procreation was magnified, while that of women was marginalized.[15] Not surpriz-

[15] It is also likely that the use of rituals was related to the uncertainties of the

ingly, this was consolidated in the recognition of paternal control over children in prescriptive literature (e.g. VDS 15.6).

The offspring obtained, moreover, were connected with the father through rituals. For instance, the son was first fed by the father (BAU 6.4.25) and then handed over for breast-feeding to the mother (ibid.: 6.4.27). This probably symbolically incorporated the newborn son within the patrilineage and asserted the father's role in childbirth (Kessler 1976: 77). Besides, the possibility of recognizing a range of sons other than natural ones was accepted (GDS 28.34–35, VDS 17.26–39).

At another level, the importance of the physical process of birth was minimized through the growing emphasis on the *upanayana* or initiation prescribed for boys and men belonging to the first three *varṇas*. This was thought to lead to a second birth (e.g. ADS 1.1.1.16, GDS 1.10, VDS 2.3) which was explicitly considered to be superior to the first.[16] The second birth, moreover, was a spiritual one, in which the *ācārya* or teacher virtually usurped the role of the mother (SB 11.5.4.17).

Almost simultaneously, women's role in procreation and consequently their sexuality, was devalued. This is evident from the growing tendency to view menstruation and childbirth as polluting. Hence, touching, conversing with, or even seeing such women had to be avoided (e.g. SGS 4.11.6, PGS 2.8.4, ADS 1.5.16.19, GDS 23.12,35, VDS 4.38, 23.12).[17]

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physical process of pregnancy and childbirth. Nevertheless, the specific form of the rituals and their control meant that the role of men, as fathers or priests, was viewed as crucial. At another level, the notion of creation implicit in cosmogonies suggested that sexual intercourse was not a creative activity, unlike austerity, or more typically, the performance of a sacrifice.

[16] The *upanayana* was also a means of dealing with the vexatious question of male puberty. As Kessler (1976: 80) observes, there is no single marked chronological or physiological point at which men attain puberty. For women, on the other hand, menstruation is a clear demarcation between childhood and womanhood. Ritual initiation, by creating an artificial turning point for the boy, was certainly one way of overcoming this problem. – male → ejaculation

[17] This was extended to the notion of women as polluting in general. At the same time, it was perhaps unwittingly recognized that from the point of view of the woman, reproduction in a gender-stratified society could be a source of

At another level, the growing emphasis on procreation raised the problem of regulating access to potentially reproductive women. Prescriptive literature was marked by an insistence that such women marry (GDS 18.21, VDS 17.67, BDS 4.1.15) and reproduce. Nevertheless, the existence of women who did not conform to the norm, including prostitutes, and unfaithful wives, was recognized, although they were viewed with disfavour (BSS 2.5, ADS 1.6.19.14, GDS 17.15, VDS 14.10, 14.19).

As important was the continued debate on the relative importance of procreative partners, which was never finally resolved. Taking the analogy of the field (the woman) and the seed, progeny were supposed to belong to the person who owned the field. Nevertheless, *parabīja* (literally the seed of another) was regarded as potentially dangerous (ADS 2.6.13.6, BDS 2.2.3.36, VDS 17.9). However, recognizing the importance of the *parabīja* implicitly weakened the claims to the ownership of the 'field' or the woman. Similarly, denying the importance of the reproductive role of women, if carried to its logical conclusion, led to the opinion attributed to Yājñavalkya (SB 1.3.1.21), that it did not really matter if the wife consorted with other men. Defining the limits of individual responsibility for procreation thus presented almost intractable problems.

There is evidence to suggest that women may have resisted the role assigned to them in procreation. This is reflected in the relative paucity of goddesses in comparison to gods, who were invoked in prayers for offspring. More important, those responsible for the destruction of *bhrūṇas* or embryos were conceived of as demonesses

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weakness. This is evident from the characterization of an unimpregnated (*apravītā*) cow as one which possessed unimpaired vigour (*ayātayāmnī*, SB 3.3.1.16), this being used for exchanging *soma* in the ritual context. A similar understanding probably underlay the changes in the words commonly used to designate the wife. These shifted from *jāyā* with its emphasis on the procreative role of the woman, to *patnī* envisaging her as a counterpart to the *pati*, to *bhāryā*, literally she who has to be borne. Semantically, the shift was from a positive link with procreation to a negative, passive, role in the process. It is likely that this was associated with the structuring of procreation within the context of the *gṛha*.

(e.g. RV 10.155.2)[18] instead of as demons. Besides, in the human context, every *patnī* was regarded as a potential destroyer of offspring (*prajāghnī*, PGS 1.11.2), this attribute having to be conjured away through chants and rituals. That there were women who may have resisted the specific social construction of reproduction is also evident from the provision for banishing the *bhāryā* or wife who did not (BDS 4.1.22) or could not (ibid.: 2.2.4.6) cooperate in the process.

It is in this context that attempts to institutionalize marriage need to be viewed. This involved the hierarchical arrangement of different forms of marriage, with a marked preference for those requiring the gift of a daughter. While this was implicit in the term most commonly used for the proceedings, *vivāha*, derived from the root *vah* suggesting the carrying away of the daughter from the house of her parents (Chatterjee Sastri 1972: 15, Prabhu 1954: 150, Shastri 1949: 263) as well as in the notion of the bride as the gift of the gods, including Soma, the *gandharvas* and Agni (RV 10.85.41, PGS 1.4.16, VDS 28.5), myths point to the existence of a range of alternative possibilities. This included the choice of husbands by Sūryā (RV 1.119.5) as well as a mutual choice of partners who cement the bond with an exchange of gifts, as in the case of the Heaven and Earth (PVB 7.10.1–3). A third possibility, associated with Prajāpati, involved the gift of the daughter. It was this which was developed through rituals and prescriptions.

Marriage was explicitly connected with the commencement of *gārhapatya* and the continuation of the patrilineage (e.g. RV 10.85.42), with the wife being acquired for procreation and wealth (ibid.: 10.85.41). This association with prosperity is also evident in the *saptapadī* rite, where the seven steps were for food, strength, wealth, comfort, or well-being, offspring or cattle, the seasons and companionship (PGS 1.8.1. AGS 1.7.19, SGS 1.14.6). It is significant that the first textual reference to this formula occurs not in the context of marriage but in the *soma* sacrifice, being recited

[18] The possibility of human *bhrūṇahās* was also recognized. These included men and women who were regarded as ritually polluting (BSS 27.9) and condemned (e.g. ADS 1.9.24.8, GDS 21.9, VDS 1.20).

by the priest while leading the cow used for the exchange of *soma* (e.g. ApSS 10.22.12, 10.23.1). Given the notion of Soma as the embodiment of prosperity, the use of the chant in the context of marriage was probably a means of ensuring the well-being of the *gṛhapati* to be, through the appropriation of the powers inherent in the bride.

The emphasis on exchanging women as the ideal form of marriage is also reflected in the recognition and hierarchical ordering of six or eight types of marriage in the later brahmanical tradition. While these may have represented variants practised in different communities, or amongst different social strata, the ordering which was enforced betrayed a preference for forms which included patriarchal elements (Lingat 1973: 59–60, R.S. Sharma 1983b: 53). For instance, the first and the best form of marriage, commonly referred to as *brahma* (AGS 1.6.1, GDS 4.6, BDS 1.11.20.2, VDS 1.30), involved the gift of the daughter by her father, who also endowed her with ornaments. The second form, *daiva*, considered only slightly less meritorious, was characterized by the gifting of the daughter in the sacrificial context (AGS 1.6.2, GDS 4.9, BDS 1.11.20.5, VDS 1.31). The *prājāpatya* form was probably ranked third on account of the conditional nature of the gift (Chatterjee 1956: 48) so that the newly-wed couple could fulfil *dharma* together (AGS 1.6.3, BDS 1.11.20.3, GDS 4.7).

The less desirable forms of marriage involved different kinds of exchanges. These included the *ārṣa*, ranked fourth (AGS 1.6.4, GDS 4.8, BDS 1.11.20.4, VDS 1.32), in which the bridegroom gave a cow and a bull to his father-in-law,[19] and the *gāndharva*, ranked fifth, based on the mutual consent of the bride and bridegroom, without any tangible material exchange or parental intervention (AGS 1.6.5, GDS 4.10, BDS 1.11.20.6, VDS 1.33). The sixth form, the *āsura*, involved the exchange of the woman for wealth (AGS 1.6.6, GDS 4.11, BDS 1.11.20.7), while the last two types, the *paiśāca* and *rākṣasa* (AGS 1.6.7, 8, GDS 4.13, 12, VDS

[19] The designation of this form as *ārṣa*, implying an association with the *ṛṣis*, suggests that this was probably an ancient and venerated practice which was gradually devalued.

1.34), were characterized by the carrying off of the woman, forcibly or otherwise. It is likely that such unions were condemned as they violated the father's claim to legitimately control and give his daughter (R.S. Sharma 1983b: 53).

The discourse on procreation and its control indicates both the possibilities and the problems inherent in asserting the dominance of the *gṛhapati* over the process. While a successful assertion of control could result in an ability to expand and dispose off a range of resources, including potentially procreative women, labour, and by extension, the produce of labour, it was not easily established. In this context, the male householder attempted to reinforce his position by asserting his control over other resources and their distribution, as well as by using some of these resources to forge ties with socio- political categories which were beginning to occupy dominant positions and whose support was useful in enabling the *gṛhapati* to consolidate his position vis-à-vis other kinsfolk.

One of the distinctive features of the early Vedic tradition was the association of wealth with household units rather than with individuals. This is reflected in prayers to obtain two- and four-footed beings for the *niveśa* (RV 9.69.7), cattle for the *gṛha* (ibid.: 9.49.2), jewels for the *dama* (ibid.: 6.74.1), wealth for the *okas* (ibid.: 1.64.10) and prosperity for the *kṣaya* (ibid.: 8.27.16). As opposed to this, in the later Vedic tradition and subsequently, *paśu*, *anna* or *prajā* were desired for the individual male sacrificer. This meant that the claims of individual men to such resources were recognized and legitimized, possibly at the expense of more amorphous, less clearly defined claims.

The issue in focus and its envisaged resolution is evident in the discussion on *dāya* or inheritance. The term itself occurs rarely in the *Ṛg Veda*, and has the sense of reward rather than inheritance (Basu 1925: 26). It was evidently a new institution, and its development was handled through legends and prescriptions rather than through myths, pointing to the fact that it was probably not entirely consonant with earlier values and practices.

Legends pertaining to *dāya* almost invariably linked the institution with Manu, the primeval man and founder of the human race (e.g. AB 5.22.9, BSS 14.5, BDS 2.2.3.2, VDS 17.52). The transfer

of the *dāya* was envisaged as taking place amongst kinsmen, exemplified by Manu and his sons, to the exclusion of kinswomen. Secondly, the kinsmen were conceived of as belonging to different generations, although a sharing of resources was envisaged amongst brothers. Third, the kinsmen eligible to participate were those who were active householders—Manu's son, Nābhanediṣṭa, was deprived of a share as he was not a householder—his father finding a way out by teaching him a certain sacrifice which enabled him to obtain a thousand (possibly) cattle (AB 5.22.9).

The close parallels envisaged in the prescriptions of the Dharma Sūtras are striking. For instance, women were described as *adāyā*, that is, without a *dāya* or inheritance, as they were *nirindriyā* or devoid of strength (BDS 2.2.3.47). Those eligible to participate in the process included fathers and sons (ADS 2.6.14.1, GDS 28.1, 2) or men who were considered to be their equivalents. These included those who were classified as less legitimate sons (GDS 28.35), *sapiṇḍas*, that is, men belonging to three preceding and three succeeding patrilineal generations, brothers (BDS 1.5.11.7) and those with whom spiritual kinship was established, including the *ācārya* or teacher, and the *antevāsin* or disciple (ADS 2.6.14.3, VDS 17.82). Primogeniture was evidently not very significant. Finally, those who had entered a different *āśrama* (i.e. apart from that of the householder) were considered ineligible to receive a share (VDS 17.52).

Dāyabhāga[20] thus structured the sharing of resources between men and women and amongst men, and legitimized a directional transfer of resources from one generation of householders to the next. Not surprisingly, this was described as conducive to the increase of *dharma* (*dharmavṛddhi*, GDS 28.4). While this has been interpreted as a multiplication of the cult (Lingat 1973: 62), it is possible that it was thought to lead to the proliferation of *dharma* in a broader sense, involving the sustenance of the new socio-political order through the branching out of a particular form of

[20] The term *dāyabhāga*, as used in the present context, refers to the literal sharing of the inheritance rather than to the school of law which was later known by that name.

household organization which provided the basis for consolidating resources as well as for generating them.

The norms which evolved regarding *dāyabhāga* also meant a denial of earlier or alternative patterns of sharing resources within the household as well as amongst kinsfolk. It is likely that this was resisted. This was probably partly countered by recognizing the validity of *deśa* and *kula dharma*, the practices specific to particular regions or families (ADS 2.6.15.1) in matters of inheritance. At another level, it was met by building up and reinforcing ties between the *gṛhapati* and those in control of socio-political power, through systems of exchange.[21]

The implications of the connections which were developed between the *gṛhapati* and those in positions of status are evident from an examination of *dakṣiṇā* and *dāna*. From the *gṛhapati*'s perspective, the ability to channelize resources in such exchanges guaranteed his access to the sacred and would have legitimized his claim to control and distribute the productive resources of the *gṛha*. Hence, although such exchanges may not have been very significant in terms of the quantity of resources transferred, the ability to participate in them strengthened his claims to other resources as well.

Given the significance of such exchanges, it is not surprizing that women were not expected to participate in them. In fact, the only form of ritual gift-giving open to women was that of the first alms to the *brahmacārin* who commenced his career by begging from either his teacher's wife or from his own mother (SB 11.3.3.7, SGS 2.6.5, PGS 2.5.5, BDS 1.2.3.17–18). What is significant is that this donation was confined within the kin network of the *gṛha*, with the mother offering alms to her son, or someone regarded as his equivalent, contrasting with the gifts made by the *gṛhapati* which connected him with those beyond his own *gṛha*. Thus, women had fewer opportunities of using access to distribution as a means of mediating between the household and other institutions.[22]

[21] In a different context, Gailey (1987: 199) argues that while taxation may represent a demand on the household, individual responsibility for payment often legitimizes individual claims to the resources of the household.

[22] That women may have attempted to participate in such exchanges is

Other forms of exchange which were marginalized included those amongst kinsfolk whose relationship was not hierarchically ordered. Such exchanges may have been reciprocal rather than directional, and probably included those amongst *jñātis* (RV 10.117.9), *sakhās* (ibid.: 10.117.4) and *bandhus* (ibid.: 8.21.4). Given the more or less equivalent status of the participants, it is likely that the resources transferred would have been more or less symmetrical over a period of time. However, such exchanges were not developed further within the brahmanical tradition. On the contrary, appropriating the wealth of the undifferentiated kin community was recognized as a legitimate goal, both in major sacrifices such as the *rājasūya* (e.g. LSS 9.3.16) and in routine domestic rituals such as the new and full moon sacrifice (SB 1.2.1.7).

Simultaneously, the offering of the *madhuparka* and *arghya* was constantly enjoined, with the *gṛhapati* as the donor, while the recipients included the *ācārya*, *ṛtvij* and *snātaka*, all associated with the domain of the sacred, the *rājā*, the *śvaśura* or father-in-law, and less frequently, *pitṛvya* or paternal uncle and *vivāhya* or groom (AGS 1.24.2–4, ApGS 13.19, PGS 1.3.1, KGS 4.4.21, ADS 2.4.8.6, GDS 5.28, BDS 2.3.6.36). Thus, less structured exchanges amongst kinsfolk were replaced by ties binding kinsmen belonging to different generations and households. As important is the fact that relationships of support amongst kinsfolk were reduced to symbolic exchanges. As a result, the claims to the resources of the household were reduced, permitting the consolidation of control in the hands of the *gṛhapati*, while the position of a select group of kinsmen was accorded recognition.

At another level, the householder was expected to provide for dependents within the household such as children, those who were sick or pregnant, women staying with him and elders (e.g. SGS

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suggested by the legend of Dhvasrā and Puruṣantī (PVB 13.7.12), two women who evidently wanted to give a thousand (presumably) cattle to two sages named Taranti and Purumidha. The latter wished to take the gift without formally receiving it, ultimately doing so through two *sāmans* named after them. Thus, the gifts made by the women were denied any formal value, and, as a result, there was no question of gaining prestige nor was the control over productive resources by women legitimized.

2.14.21, PGS 2.9.13, ADS 2.2.4.12, GDS 5.26, BDS 2.7.13.5), the householder himself being expected to eat after others. While this ensured that all members of the household received a share of food, the fact that this was channelled through the *gṛhapati* underscored their dependence on him and reinforced his ultimate control over the distribution of the produce of the *gṛha*.

While claims to the resources of the household on the basis of generalized ties of kinship were regulated, other claims, including that of hospitality or *ātithya* were recognized (e.g. PGS 2.9.12, ADS 1.4.14.1, VDS 8.7). The principles involved in *ātithya* emphasized its universality. For instance, food had to be offered even to dogs, crows, *cāṇḍālas* and *patitas* (VDS 11.10). At the same time, the form of *ātithya* was expected to vary according to *varṇa*. Thus, the offering and receiving of *ātithya* meant the introduction of a different set of norms regarding the distribution of household produce.

Defining legitimate claimants to resources was, in a sense, indicative of a shift from a clan-oriented to a lineage-oriented system. The former was 'an inclusive unit tending to include all possible members even though that means offering shares in the clan's corporate resources' (Fried 1967: 124). The latter, on the other hand, restricted membership, and, by extension, access to productive resources.

At another level, the repeated emphasis on defining those eligible to participate in various kinds of exchanges implicitly indicates continuous challenges to the process. It is in this situation that socialization into definite roles acquired importance.

IV

Given the differential roles expected of men and women on the one hand, and of men in different stages of their lives on the other, socialization was necessary to provide information regarding these roles, as well as to ensure their acceptance. The problem of access to and the use of the sacred, as reflected within the brahmanical tradition, provides an insight into the process of socialization, if one views 'ritual forms, like speech forms, as transmitters of culture which are generated in social relations, and which, by their selective

emphases, exercise a constraining effect on social behaviour' (Douglas 1973: 21).[23]

The use of the sacred for socialization required defining sacrality and regulating access to it. It also necessitated the incorporation of values and norms considered desirable within sacral activities, and their reiteration to ensure that these were effectively communicated.

At one level, the issue of defining the sacred was handled through myths. As we have seen, the question was often posed in terms of who had discovered the sacrifice, the answers being linked to deities regarded as representative of the dominant socio-political categories. In terms of gender, some myths envisaged goddesses such as Uṣas and Naktā as the mothers of the sacrifice, who brought it to mortals (RV 5.41.7). However, such conceptualizations were relatively few. Besides, they were not developed further in the later Vedic tradition.[24] What is more, Vāc, the goddess regarded as the 'typical' frivolous woman (SB 3.2.4.4–6) was conceived of as abandoning the *gandharvas*, celestial beings possessed of knowledge of the Vedas, in favour of the gods, who could merely sing. In the long run, the gods, and not Vāc, were thought to have acquired control over sacred learning and the related cult. Thus, there is a perceptible shift between early and later Vedic mythological traditions, with the latter focusing squarely on the issue of control of the cult and resolving it in favour of gods as opposed to goddesses.

That the mythical resolution ran parallel to the human situation is evident from the composition and compilation of the corpus of texts associated with the sacred. Only a handful of the hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* are ascribed to women, and even in these cases, the authorship is not always certain (Sastri 1969: 24–25). Thus, although there was no explicit prohibition, it is obvious that in practice, defining the sacred through the composition of hymns was an activity to which women had only limited access.[25] As an

[23] As Kertzer (1988: 25) observes: 'Ritual is used to constitute power, not just reflect power that already exists.'

[24] Nevertheless, feminine divinities, typified by the Āpaḥ or waters, were regarded as important within the framework of the sacrifice, being equated with it (e.g. AB 2.8.2, SB 1.1.1.12).

[25] The limitations under which women laboured are reflected in the hymn

extension of this, their role in defining the nature and scope of the sacrificial cult in which the Vedic hymns were employed as chants, was also restricted.

This is reflected in the paucity of references to women performing sacrifices, which were in most instances (e.g. RV 4.42.9, 5.61.5–7) regarded as exceptional occasions. More generally, there was no feminine equivalent of the term *yajamāna* underscoring the fact that the male alone had the right to initiate the performance of the sacrifice (Leslie 1989: 148).[26]

At another level, women evidently retained some control over defining the norms and practices associated with rites of passage. For instance, what was prescribed by women could be followed during the funeral rites of the wife (ADS 2.6.15.9). They also had a certain say in marriage rituals (ApGS 2.15). Besides, they may have been able to define the *dharma* of particular regions, castes and families (GDS 11.22, VDS 19.7). More generally, their role in defining *dharma* was acknowledged within some sections of the brahmanical tradition (ADS 2.11.29.15). Unfortunately, though understandably, the exact prescriptions which may have been formulated by women were not recorded.

What was recorded and codified in the Gṛhya Sūtras presents an amalgam of ritual traditions.[27] On the one hand a range of rites

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attributed to Ghoṣā (RV 10:39.6) in which she appeals to the gods as a son rather than as a daughter, which would suggest that the latter could not legitimately claim divine favours.

[26] Besides, although the presence of the *patnī* was regarded as essential for the sacrifice, variations could be introduced in the routine *agnihotra* (AB 7.32.8, ApSS 6.12.5) and the new and full moon sacrifice (SB 1.3.1.20, ApSS 2.6.4) in her absence, or arrangements could be made to obtain another *patnī* to ensure ritual continuity (SSS 4.15.23). There is no suggestion that the *patnī* could acquire another *yajamāna* to enable her to complete the sacrifice on her own. In this context, it is not surprizing that women could rarely define sacrificial goals. One of the few goals which were recognized for women was that of obtaining a husband, the *tryambakā iṣṭi* being prescribed for the *patikāmā* maiden (BSS 5.16, ApSS 8.18.3).

[27] Initially, virtually every household type was associated with the performance of rituals. We have evidence, for instance, of the invocation of gods in the *kṣiti* (RV 4.1.9), *dama* (ibid.: 4.7.2), *okas* (ibid.: 7.32.4), *pastya* (ibid.: 9.65.23),

of passage was systematized, focusing on the role of the *gṛhapati* who was frequently recognized as a substitute for the priest (Gonda 1980: 194). At the same time, some of these rituals were given the character of a sacrifice by emphasizing the use of fire.[28] On the other hand, the Gṛhya Sūtras incorporated watered-down versions of routine *śrauta* rituals such as the *agnihotra* (ĀGS 1.2.1,2) which were both simpler and less expensive than those prescribed in the Śrauta Sūtras, and in which the participation of priests was optional (AGS 1.3.6). This was probably useful in extending the scope of the *śrauta* rituals by making them more accessible.

The structuring of socialization through rituals implied, at the fundamental, definitional level, a recognition and enforcement of the gender hierarchy. At the same time, the access men had to the sacred depended on their position within the kinship or household structure, with some positions such as that of the *gṛhapati* being recognized as of central importance, whereas others were regarded as peripheral or even detrimental to the sacred/social order. Thus, access to the sacred communicated significant messages regarding the relative importance of kinsmen as well.

Socialization into gender roles focused primarily on enforcing a particular definition of the sexual and procreative role of women on the one hand, and on the exclusion of women from other roles on the other. A causal relationship was developed between the two, that is, the exclusion of women from non-sexual and non-procreative roles was implicitly and occasionally explicitly justified in terms of the understanding of what was viewed and portrayed as their natural role. At the same time, an effort was made to regulate their 'natural' role through a range of social restrictions.

Of the various forms of sexual relationships referred to in the

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kṣaya (ibid.: 9.9.2) and *gṛha* (ibid.: 4.49.3). While there is no evidence to determine whether the form of ritual associated with different household types varied, the naming of the consolidated ritual tradition as *gṛhya* may indicate a certain selection which was biased in favour of the practices prevalent in the *gṛha*.

[28] These included the *upanayana* (AGS 1.20.2), wedding (ApGS 4.9), *caula* or the first cutting of the hair (AGS 1.17.2), the cutting of the beard (PGS 2.6.9) and the *sīmantonnayana* performed during pregnancy (ibid.: 1.15.4).

early Vedic tradition, only that between the *pati* and *patnīl jāyā* was recognized as legitimate within the later Vedic and subsequently developed ritual tradition. In fact, the *patnī* was virtually the only kinswoman whose presence was required for the sacrifice, ranging from the *agnihotra* (BSS 3.4) to the *soma* sacrifice, *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha*.[29] Thus, each performance of such rituals would have conveyed the notion that this was the only possible or ideal form of the relationship between man and woman.

The implications of this were elaborated during the new and full moon sacrifice (BSS 1.12, ApSS 2.5.9), during which the wife was considered to be identical to her divine counterparts, with a prayer being offered to ensure that she be *avidhavā* and *suputrā* (i.e. not a widow and endowed with good sons) like Indrāṇī. In other words, an effort was made, every fortnight, to endow her with what were viewed as the positive attributes of a husband and sons.

Within this single legitimate relationship, the position of the husband and the wife vis-à-vis the ritual was clearly differentiated. In the very preparation for the sacrifice, rites were performed silently for the woman, while a variety of chants were used for the *yajamāna* (Gonda 1965: 361). The ambiguity of the wife's position is also evident in the conceptualization of her as the *jaghanārdha* or the hind part of the sacrifice, both in the context of the paradigmatic new and full moon sacrifice (SB 1.3.1.12) and in the *vājapeya* (ibid.: 5.2.1.8). At the same time, her lower half, the portion below the navel, was described as *amedhya*, literally unfit for the sacrifice, and had to be symbolically concealed (ibid.: 1.3.1.13). Thus, the notion of the wife as potentially disruptive on account of her sexuality was reiterated regularly.

Besides, rituals such as the annual *varuṇapraghāsa*, one of the *cāturmāsyas*, provided an occasion for publicly questioning the wife regarding her sexual activities. She was expected to declare whether she had a lover or not (e.g. SB 2.5.2.20, ApSS 8.6.19–22). If she had a lover and declared this, the man would meet with divine

[29] Apart from the *patnī*, the other category of women who could participate in the ritual was the *dāsī* or slave woman who was probably even more dependent than the wife. Occasionally, one was treated as a substitute for the other (ApSS 1.21.8).

retribution, whereas if she did not declare the truth, a similar fate was expected to befall her kinsfolk. Not surprizingly, the husband was not subjected to a similar interrogation.

Attempts were also made to regulate the sexuality of women in general, exemplified in the equation between the *vedī* or sacrificial altar, and the *yoṣā* or woman in the new and full moon sacrifice (SB 1.3.3.8), with provisions for covering it with grass so as not to make it naked, *anagnā*, in the presence of the gods and learned priests. This notion of female sexuality as potentially polluting and/or disruptive was probably reiterated in virtually every ritual, as the new and full moon sacrifice constituted the basic sacrificial paradigm which was modified and elaborated on other occasions.

The perception of women as disruptive also underlay the insistence on *brahmacarya* in ritual contexts in particular and sacral contexts in general. While *brahmacarya* could have wider connotations, the notion of chastity was central to its definition (Gonda 1965: 285). This was a pre-requisite for the acquisition and imparting of sacral knowledge (PGS 2.5.12, ADS 1.1.2.26, GDS 16.3, VDS 13.25–26) and formed a part of penances (GDS 22.3, VDS 24.5). Besides, it was prescribed for virtually every sacrifice (BSS 10.59, ApSS 4.1.2) and rites of passage, including marriage (AGS 1.8.10, ApGS 8.8, PGS 1.8.21, KGS 1.4.9).[30] The other acts which were often simultaneously prohibited included eating meat and speaking falsehood (BSS 2.20, ApSS 22.3.16), a telling commentary on the perception of sexual relations.

It has been argued (Turner 1969: 104) that sexual abstinence very often leads to a reduction of sexual polarity. However, in the present context, where abstinence was viewed as a possibility open to only one of the participants in such relationships, it clearly strengthened the view that he who abstained was superior and purer than the object of abstinence, that is, the woman.

At another level, as we have seen, the procreative role of wives was regulated and minimized through its ritualization, evident in

[30] Occasionally, it could be extended to prohibit even talking to women (and *śūdras*) (ApSS 15.20.16). Besides, the *rajasvalā* or menstruating woman was viewed as actually polluting and denied access to the ritual (BSS 27.8).

the exaltation of 'alternative' births such as the *dīkṣā*[31] and *upanayana*. Besides, as noted earlier, the sacrifice itself was viewed as a means of ensuring procreation.[32] At the same time, procreation, thus defined, was itself regarded as an act of *dharma* (ADS 2.9.24.8), being a means of discharging the debt to the *pitṛs* (BDS 2.9.16.5).

These definitions of sexuality and procreation were embedded in more general notions of the nature of masculinity and femininity. Thus, in the new and full moon sacrifice (SB 1.3.1.9), a single 'masculine' spoon was handled before numerous 'feminine' spoons. This was equated with a single youth leading numerous women, evidently an ideal situation.

The structuring of the relations between the sexes was extended to rites of passage as well. These could be performed with *mantras* for males but without *mantras* for females (e.g. AGS 1.15.10, 1.16.6, 1.17.19, etc., SGS 1.28.22). This meant that the verbal identification between the participant in the ritual and the gods, open to men, could not be developed in the case of women. Besides, certain rites of passage, such as the *upanayana*, were open only to men. As suggested earlier, this marked the ritualization of puberty. In a situation where ritual changes were viewed as superior to physiological ones, the fact that boys and not girls had access to such a tradition would have demarcated their superiority and inferiority vis-à-vis one another. As the *upanayana* entailed a change in the religious and social status of the boy and was viewed as preparatory to granting him access to forms of sacred knowledge and consequent empowerment, access, or lack of access, to the ritual was socially significant,[33] implying as it did a differential access to sacred learning.

[31] The *dīkṣā* was evidently unknown in the early Vedic tradition (Eliade 1975: 54, Potdar 1953: 87).

[32] Apart from the examples cited earlier, the *piṇḍapitṛyajña* or sacrifice to the patrilineal ancestors was viewed as a means of obtaining offspring (SSS 4.5.8, ApSS 1.10.10). In this context, impregnating powers were attributed to the *piṇḍa* or offering of food, symbolic of the bond between the deceased patrilineal ancestors and their successors.

[33] Although we do have references to women philosophers such as Gārgī (BAU 3.8.1–12), there is nothing to indicate that women had legitimate access

The *upanayana* and the period of *brahmacarya* which followed it were important in inculcating a sense of subordination and dependence in the student vis-à-vis the teacher (e.g. ADS 1.2.6.7, GDS 2.20–21, BDS 1.2.3.39, VDS 7.12). This was achieved through gestures and movements as well as through the insistence on obedience. This probably ensured that students 'would come out strongly imbued with faith in the divinely ordained nature and the essential soundness of the existing social organization and the traditional cultural ideals' (Anjaria 1935: 175).

Brahmacarya was also accompanied by the development of what may be termed 'spiritual kinship' (Campbell 1964: 223) between the teacher and taught through the imparting of sacred learning and the performance of common rituals. This bond was expressed in terms fairly similar to those which identified kinsmen. The claims of spiritual kinsmen to one another's property has been referred to earlier. Besides, the observances following the death of spiritual kinsmen were more or less similar to those prescribed on the death of other kinsfolk (e.g. AGS 4.4.19,21,26). The emphasis on the bond ensured access to support outside the ordinary kin network for both participants. Women, unlike men, were denied such possibilities.

In the later brahmanical tradition, marriage was viewed as the counterpart of the *upanayana* for the woman. However, unlike the latter ritual, which marked the entry of the boy into the sacral domain and his gradual empowerment, the former, whereby the bride was separated from her natal home and incorporated within her marital one (AGS 1.7.13, ApGS 3.3, PGS 1.4.15), had con-

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to this aspect of sacrality. Megasthenes's account, cited by Max Müller (1968: 24) corroborates the restriction on the access to sacred learning by women and suggests interesting reasons for this: 'The Indians did not communicate their metaphysical doctrines to women thinking that if their wives understood these doctrines and learned to be indifferent to pleasure and pain and to consider life and death as the same, they would no longer continue to be slaves of others. Or if they failed to understand them then they would be talkative and communicate this knowledge to those who had no right to it.' On the other hand, references to men undergoing pupilhood and acquiring sacred knowledge in the process are fairly frequent (SB 2.4.4.4, 10.6.1.2–3, BAU 6.2.4, 2.1.4, CU 4.4.4, etc.).

notations of conquest.[34] Needless to say, the woman was not envisaged as the conqueror.

The notion of marriage as a conquest is evident from the use of the *rāṣṭrabhṛt*, *jaya* and *abhyātāna* formulae (e.g. PGS 1.5.7) and from the provision to obliterate the 'evil' inherent in the bride (e.g. RV 10.85.44, PGS 1.11.2), this being defined in terms of a potential ability to destroy the *pati*, *prajā*, *paśu*, *gṛha* and *yaśas* or fame (e.g. PGS 1.11.2).

The ritual was, moreover, structured to convey the notion of the bride and the groom as unequal partners. For instance, while tests were devised to ascertain the 'true' nature of the bride (AGS 1.5.5, ApGS 3.16, 17), none were prescribed for the bridegroom. Besides, the ability to chant *mantras* was restricted to the husband, who occasionally spoke on behalf of the wife as well (SGS 1.14.1).

With the decline of the major *śrauta* sacrifices, the performance of the *pañcamahāyajñas* was emphasized as a duty expected of every householder. This included relatively simple offerings to the gods, patrilineal ancestors, priests, men and beings in general (SB 11.5.6.1, AGS 3.1.2, GDS 5.3, BDS 2.6.11.1). Amongst these activities, the offering of hospitality was regarded as particularly important (ADS 2.3.6.6). Once again, women were not expected to participate directly in such offerings.

We had seen how goddesses (and occasionally demonesses) were gradually portrayed as marginal or hostile to the performers of major sacrifices. The fear of goddesses harming the sacrificer was reiterated in the new and full moon sacrifice (SSS 1.5.9) and similarly exorcized. As suggested earlier, the notion of the hostile goddess probably reflected social tensions which resulted from the attempts to use rituals to perpetuate the values of an increasingly gender-stratified socio-political order. It is also likely that the concept of the hostile goddess incorporated the stresses inherent in attempts to assimilate alternative, possibly goddess-centred, ritual traditions within the fold of a more patriarchal religious system.

This possibility is reinforced by evidence which suggests that

[34] That the process may have been painful for the woman is evident from the provisions for *mantras* to be used in case she cried (AGS 1.8.4, SGS 1.15.2).

women were excluded from ritual roles which may have been open to them in earlier or alternative traditions. This is indicated for instance by the ambiguous position of the *subrahmaṇya* priest. Vāc, a goddess, was supposed to have functioned as the *subrahmaṇya* priest of the gods in a *sattra* (PVB 25.18.4), suggesting an association between this priest and feminine elements. On the human plane however, the priestly role was not open to women. Nevertheless, the earlier tradition was not (or could not be) totally eliminated. Hence the *subrahmaṇya* priest was treated as symbolic of the feminine (AB 6.26.3), receiving the typically masculine bull as *dakṣiṇā*, the gift and the donee being viewed as a *mithuna* consisting of a masculine and a feminine element. In other instances, the evidence for appropriation is less ambiguous. For instance, in the new and full moon sacrifice (SB 1.1.4.13), the male priest was expected to respond instead of the wife in case a particular call was sounded.

At another level, the roles assigned to the *yajamāna* and his wife in the ritual context were distinct. The former participated in what were regarded as sacred activities, making offerings, chanting *mantras*, etc. as opposed to routine chores, whereas the role of the wife was by and large an extension of her domestic activities. Apart from being used in ritual symbolism, she was expected to prepare the sacrificial offering, which would have been an extension of her domestic role as food-preparer (ApSS 1.21.8).

Legitimate access to the sacrifice provided the male householder with a means of establishing identity with powerful gods which was not open to women. Thus, the offering of the *agnyādheya* or the first establishment of the sacrificial fire was regarded as identical with the offering made by Prajāpati (SB 2.2.1.4), the *agnihotra* was regarded as a means of winning and producing all that had been won and produced by Agni, Vāyu and Sūrya (ibid.: 2.2.4.18), while the new and full moon sacrifice established an identity between Agni Gṛhapati and his human counterpart (ibid.: 1.9.3.19). Besides, the *yajamāna* was identified with Agni, Varuṇa and Indra during the *cāturmāsyas* (ibid.: 2.6.3.1).

The performance of such sacrifices was also regarded as a means of identifying with the role of the gods as ensures of material

prosperity, this in turn acquiring near cosmic dimensions. For instance, the *agnihotra* was viewed as a means of producing everything (SB 2.3.4.8) and ensuring sunrise (SB 2.3.1.5), while the new and full moon sacrifice was conceived of as 'kindling' or initiating seasonal changes (ibid.: 1.3.4.7).

The claims to ensuring general prosperity suggested an implicit identity between the *yajamāna* and other sacrificers who were associated with a similar role, such as the *rājā* or the *śreṣṭha*. This was often underscored through rituals such as the *agnihotra* (ApSS 6.14.7), *agnyādheya* (SB 2.2.3.1), and both the *śrauta* and the *gṛhya* versions of the new and full moon sacrifice (SB 11.2.5.5, ApGS 2.7). This connection was also established through rites of passage, as noted earlier. Thus, the *gṛhapatil yajamāna* was identified with men of status and conceived of as fulfilling a similar role in the emerging socio-political order. Within the domestic context, such an identification permitted the assertion of dominance vis-à-vis other members of the household.

This was reinforced through routine rituals such as the *agnihotra* (BSS 3.8) and the new and full moon sacrifice (ApSS 1.10.3) which focused on the claims of the *gṛhapati* to the *gṛha*. Moreover, all those sharing a common residence, the *amātyas*, were bound to the *yajamānal gṛhapati* through the sharing of the sacrificial oblations during the *varuṇapraghāsa, sākamedha* and the *soma* and animal sacrifices (ApSS 8.5.41, 8.10.7, 13.5.6, 11.16.13).

The ideal *gṛha* and the relationships embedded in it were also symbolically established through the use of chants (AB 3.12.12, 13) with the individual self or *ātman* being equated with the strophe, offspring with the antistrophe, which shared a common metre with the strophe, the *patnī* with the additional verse inserted into certain hymns, *paśu*, the economic basis of the *gṛha* with the triplet, while the *gṛha* itself, encompassing these elements, was equated with the *sūkta* or hymn. The symbolism is obvious: the *ātman* and *prajā* ideally shared a common basis, exemplified by the metre, the *patnī*, though necessary, was viewed as extraneous, cattle was ideally to be numerous, as signified by the use of the triplet, with the *gṛha* being visualized as a unified whole, incorporating all these elements. The equation was carried further through prescribed

tonal variations. For instance, the strophe was to be recited in a moderate tone, to ensure perfection of the self, the antistrophe had to be recited loudly to ensure that a man's offspring surpassed him, the extraneous verse had to be recited softly so that the wife did not retort or protest, the triplet had to be recited in a sonorous voice in order to obtain cattle, and the hymn had to be recited firmly to ensure that the *gṛha* was stable and provided support.

Patrilineal bonds within the *gṛha* were also reinforced through rituals recognizing the bond between the *yajamāna* and his patrilineal ancestors on the one hand and that between the *yajamāna* and his son on the other. Unlike the husband-wife bond, patrilineal ties were envisaged as more symmetrical and were based on a notion of mutual support.

The ties with patrilineal ancestors or *pitṛs* were recognized in the *agnyādheya* which included an offering to them (BSS 2.9,10) in the *agnihotra* (SB 2.3.1.19, BSS 3.6) and in the monthly *piṇḍapitṛyajña* (SB 2.4.2.16, SSS 4.3.1, ApSS 1.7.1). Recollection of the *pitṛs* was also incorporated within the less complicated *gṛhya* rituals (SGS 4.1.1). Besides, they were invoked in the daily *pañcamahāyajñas* (SB 11.5.6.1, PGS 2.9.9, BDS 2.3.5.4). The invocation of the *pitṛs* on virtually every ritual occasion was accompanied by the extension of the 'right' to worship them to every social category, including *śūdras* (VDS 2.7). The repeated invocation of the *pitṛs* would have conveyed the message that they, unlike other kinsmen and women, were socially and ritually important. Moreover, as suggested earlier, the emphasis on such connections may have been a means of legitimately claiming access to productive resources.

Simultaneously, the father-son bond was strengthened through the *agnihotra* (SB 2.3.4.41), which was viewed as a means of ensuring that the son carried on his father's valorous acts, and through the new and full moon sacrifice (SB 1.9.3.21, ApSS 4.16.4). Even when the sacrificial cult declined in importance, communication of sacral knowledge was occasionally restricted to the son (SB 1.6.2.4). Besides, *saṃskāras* such as the *jātakarman* or the ritual relating to birth established patrilineal claims to the infant son (AGS 1.15.1). Other *saṃskāras* would have underscored their

common relationship to the sacred—as we have seen, these could be performed with chants for sons but not for daughters. As such, the fact that the father and the son shared a more or less identical access to the sacred, with its potential for extension to other realms as well, would have been reiterated.[35] In other words, ritual association probably socialized men who were linked patrilineally into a belief in their own power, to the exclusion of other kinsfolk.

While some kinship ties were reiterated and reinforced through rituals, others, especially same generational ones, were scarcely recognized. These included ties amongst brothers, which were viewed as of marginal importance. Relationships which were explicitly denied in the sacrificial context included *jāmitva*. A myth narrated in connection with the *soma* sacrifice justified the exclusion of the *jāmi*, who was replaced by the *patnī* (AB 3.13.13). This demarcated wifehood as the sole legitimate kinship role open to women.

Some kinship bonds were, moreover, ritually destroyed. These included those with the *bhrātṛvya* and *sapatna*, whose destruction was envisaged through the *agnyādheya* (SB 2.1.2.17), *agnihotra* (SB 2.3.4.21, BSS 3.8), and new and full moon sacrifice and its variants (SB 1.6.4.19, BSS 23.17). However, with the consolidation of *gārhasthya*, relationships between kinsmen who were potential competitors in a situation of growing socio-political differentiation, seem to have lost their significance. Hence, these were not viewed as issues of concern in the context of *saṃskāras* or in the context of *gṛhya* rituals.

Other kinsfolk were accorded an ambiguous role in the ritual. These included the *yonisambandhas*, *jñātis* and *bandhus*, the relatively undifferentiated body of kinsfolk who were expected to participate in the inauspicious ritual of excommunication (GDS 20.2, BDS 2.1.1.35, VDS 15.12,13).

The ordering of kinship ties is also evident in the differential treatment following death accorded to the *sapiṇḍas* and *sambandhas*

[35] The connection between father and son, moreover, was viewed as synonymous with or symbolic of immortality (AB 7.33.1, BDS 2.9.16.6, VDS 17.2).

or *yonisambandhas.* The former constituted the core of the patrilineage, comprising of the father, grandfather and great grandfather on the one hand, and the son, grandson and the great grandson on the other (BDS 1.5.11.7), while the latter included kinsfolk with whom relationships were not so clearly structured. Although a period of ritual impurity was prescribed for both categories of relatives (ADS 2.6.15.2), it was longer for the former than for the latter (GDS 14.19). The observance of varying periods of mourning probably conveyed a succinct message regarding the relative significance of both categories of kinsfolk.

Despite the insistence on the maintenance of sacral norms and the performance of sacral activities, there are indications that not all men conformed to this pattern, which was met by threatening the man who could offer the *agnihotra* but did not do so (AB 5.25.5). The existence of men who sacrificed for women was similarly recognized and condemned (GDS 15.15). Likewise, men who were not initiated could be debarred from social intercourse (ADS 1.1.1.33, VDS 11.75). It was also recognized that a man could be ignorant of whether his ancestors were initiated or not (ADS 1.1.2.5).

Resistance to the process of socialization, implicit in the recognition of the existence of non-conforming men, is also evident in the acceptance of alternative definitions of the nature and possible roles of women. These included the conceptualization of menstruation as a potentially purifying act (BDS 2.2.4.4, VDS 28.4) which was thought to be capable of removing the evils incurred through leaving home, getting raped or abducted, and in the view that women were free from sin (*akalmaṣā*) owing to the attributes conferred on them by Soma, the *gandharvas* and Agni (BDS 2.2.4.5, VDS 28.6), the very deities who were associated with 'giving' women in marriage. Such notions implied a virtual reversal of the norms inculcated through rituals. Their incorporation within the brahmanical tradition points to the limits of socialization.

At another level, the recognition of the wife as potentially dangerous is significant. This is apparent in the marriage ritual, which contained prayers to destroy whatever was *patighnī*, *prajāghnī*, *paśughnī* and *gṛhaghnī* (destructive of the husband, off-

spring, cattle and the household respectively) in the bride (SGS 1.18.3, PGS 1.11.2). The existence of recalcitrant women is also suggested by the provision for abandoning the wife who spoke unpleasantly (BDS 2.2.4.6) as also from the enumeration of various types of hostile behaviour which wives could display, ranging from angry thoughts to attempts to murder (VDS 21.6–11). Efforts were made to cope with the situation by assuring faithful wives of a share in the worldly possessions attained by their husbands, while unfaithful women were threatened with rebirth as jackals (ibid.: 21.14–15). Such promises and threats would have been important only in a situation where actually or potentially troublesome women existed.

The inability to socialize men and women into a complete acceptance of the brahmanical ideal is also implicit in various compromises arrived at in the domestic context. For instance, although women were denied the right to sacrifice (ADS 2.6.15.17), this was modified within the *gṛhya* tradition (KGS 1.5.17). Besides, the wives of the *pitṛs* were accorded recognition within the domestic ritual (PGS 3.3.11). The offering of funerary oblations to other kinswomen was grudgingly permitted (BDS 1.5.11.5) and rituals devised by women were recognized in the context of marriage (ApGS 2.15).

It is evident that a wide range of rituals was employed to socialize women and men into the norms and ideals expected in the typical household. As far as kinswomen were concerned, such rituals emphasized their procreative or sexual roles, which were viewed as ambiguous. This was extended to constructing a hierarchy between men and women in other spheres as well, and to developing the notion of the centrality of a particular form of wifehood as opposed to other possibilities. The ties envisaged amongst kinsmen were different—these were viewed as supportive amongst men of different generations, but tension-ridden amongst those belonging to the same generation.

There is, at the same time, evidence that men and women deviated from the norms. This points to the difficulties in enforcing *gārhasthya*. Nevertheless, the institution was, I have suggested, valuable for men who were aspiring to political or ritual power as well

as for those who were asserting dominance within the *gṛha*. Hence efforts were made to establish and reiterate connections amongst such men, to ensure that one supported the other.

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The strenuous attempts to uphold *gārhasthya* implicit in the range of rituals used to bolster it, suggest that developing and maintaining the institution was not only important for the *gṛhapati* but was necessary for others as well. This is reflected, to an extent, in the location of *gārhasthya* within the framework of the *āśramas* (e.g. GDS 3.2,3).

The *āśramas*, often viewed as stages in the life of a man belonging to the first three *varṇas*, were distinguished from one another on the basis of different modes of sacral activity, including acquiring sacred learning in the context of a distinct life style, the ritual centring on the household, and less or more severe forms of asceticism. While these were ideally correlated with chronological and/or social divisions in a man's life, variations were recognized.

Although the *gṛhastha* was grouped along with other *āśramas*, it was, at the same time, perceived as distinct (e.g. GDS 3.36, VDS 8.15). The other *āśramas* were directly, and in some cases solely, associated with sacral activities, whereas in the case of *gārhasthya*, these were only a part of the *gṛhapati*'s functions. Despite this difference, *gārhasthya* was frequently viewed as superior to the rest (ibid.). What is more, this superiority was attributed to the procreative nature of the institution. Besides, procreation in the context of the *gṛha* was elevated to a sacred act. In other words, the very maintenance of the *gṛha* was upheld vis-à-vis other forms of sacral activity on the one hand, and other household forms on the other.

The importance assigned to maintaining the *gṛha* is thus obvious. As suggested earlier, this was attempted through developing ties between the *gṛhapati* and the priesthood on the one hand and the *gṛhapati* and the *rājā* on the other. The former bond was manifest in the provision for the participation of priests in household rituals, cemented through the receiving and giving of *dakṣiṇā* and *dāna*. It was also implicit on occasions when priests were not

present, it being recognized that the *gṛhapati* could officiate as a priest (e.g. AGS 1.3.6).

At another level, attempts were made to integrate *brāhmaṇas*, especially the *ācārya* or teacher, within the patrilineage. This is implicit in the notion of *brāhmaṇas* possessing two kinds of progeny (BDS 1.11.21.15)—those produced through *retas* or sperm and those produced through the imparting of sacred learning. As we have seen, teachers and pupils were recognized as substitutes in the absence of patrilineal kinsmen for staking a claim to inheritance and for the performance of rituals.

The ties between the *rājā* and the *gṛhapati* were, in a sense, less direct. This was, to an extent, inevitable, given the unique nature of the *rājā*'s position and the sheer physical constraints in terms of communication and resources in attempting to establish contact with individual *gṛhapatis*. Nevertheless, the potential for, and the legitimacy of, direct contact was continuously recognized in the importance assigned to *ātithya*.

What was more significant was the development of the notion of the *rājā*'s position and roles running parallel to those of the *gṛhapati*, this being extended to implicit or explicit identity on a number of ritual occasions.[36] Both could participate in rituals (of varying magnitude, it is true), after being initiated or reborn through a 'pure', non-physical process.[37] Besides, the focus on structuring procreation and consequently controlling and manipulating the wife was common to both kinds of rituals. Moreover, patrilineal ties were recognized as being important at both levels. This was accompanied by a common emphasis on destroying the *bhrātṛvya* or the *sapatna*. In other words, both the *rājā* and the *gṛhapati* were envisaged as functioning within an identical kinship unit and in an identical fashion.

[36] In a different context, Kertzer (1988: 211) argues that symbolic identifications are important for integrating local with national concerns. Such an integration was clearly envisaged within the brahmanical tradition.

[37] *Dīkṣā* was also symbolic of the association between the *yajamāna* and prestigious or sacral realms, connected as it was with notions of ecstasy, divinity, mystical generation and death, purification and strengthening of cosmic processes (Thite 1971: 173).

This was worked out through an identification of the goals of household rituals such as the *agnyādheya*, *agnihotra* and new and full moon sacrifice on the one hand and the *aśvamedha* on the other. Such connections were extended to the *saṃskāras* through the device of using the *jaya* verses, as well as through the invocation of gods who were regarded as powerful. In the later prescriptive literature, moreover, the *rājā* was expected to perform the rituals associated with *gārhasthya*, appointing a *purohita* for the purpose (VDS 19.3).

The emphasis on the identity of the *rājā* and the *gṛhapati* was politically significant. At one level, the importance of this connection in legitimizing *rājya* cannot be overestimated. As suggested earlier, it permitted the incorporation of the values associated with *rājya* within each household. This was particularly important in a situation where large-scale sacrifices such as the *rājasūya* were no longer feasible, and in a situation where *rājya* itself was being increasingly defined in terms of Indraic rather than Varunic or Somic possibilities.

Underlying this broad concern with legitimization was a more specific social understanding. This is evident when one considers the attention paid to defining the *gṛha* as the sole legitimate household pattern, associated with a definite type of control over produce and reproductive resources. The focus on the *gṛha*, with its hierarchically ordered kinship structure, was both politically and economically significant from the point of view of the *rājā*, providing a basis for incorporating and justifying notions of hierarchy within a framework of day-to-day existence, and for acquiring material support in the form of hospitality, tribute or taxes.

The identity with the *rājā* was also valuable for the *gṛhapati*. On the one hand, it conferred prestige on him. More concretely, it helped him consolidate his position vis-à-vis his kinsfolk and the resources of the kin group. At another level, the *rājā*, with his recognized duty of upholding *āśramadharma* (e.g. GDS 11.9), may have offered tangible support to the *gṛhapati*.

As in the case of *varṇadharma*, the upholding of *āśramadharma* by the *rājā* was selective. Thus, the *rājā* was only vaguely associated with ensuring the proper functioning of *brahmacarya*, *vānaprastha* or *sanyāsa*. His central concern was with *gārhasthya*,

and within *gārhasthya*, with the norms pertaining to sexual relations in general and to redressing violations of the property rights of men vis-à-vis women in particular (ADS 2.10.27.9, GDS 12.2,3, BDS 2.2.3.53, VDS 21.1–5). Given the attention focused on socializing women into wifehood and the possibility that this was resisted, it is likely that the support of the *rājā* in this respect was particularly valuable.

The mutual relationship of the *rājā* and the *gṛhapati* had other implications as well. The dependence of the *rājā* on the *gṛha* meant that certain possibilities, initially associated with *rājya*, were viewed as irrelevant or even potentially disruptive. We have seen how the nature of *rājya* changed substantially during the period under consideration, with the *rājā* assuming a more appropriative relationship vis-à-vis produce or productive resources, besides intervening in a range of social conflicts. Such interventions strengthened processes of socio-political differentiation, although these processes may have initially been relatively autonomous. As noted earlier, the intervention of the *rājā* in social relations was a means of winning social support. At the same time, such support could have been offered only by those who were relatively powerful. The *gṛhapati* was one such man. Hence his support was sought and obtained. This entailed the establishment of a sense of identity between the *rājā* and the *gṛhapati*. While this was obviously useful, it at the same time constricted the definition of *rājya* in terms of a single, hierarchically ordered kinship or household pattern.

What is significant is that this kinship or household pattern had little to do with the earliest, typical divine *rājās*, Varuṇa and Soma. Neither of these deities was conceived of as patriarchs or as heads of the household. Besides, their role in mythical explorations of the battle of the sexes was marginal. Their ambiguous role in mythical or ritual battles against kinsmen such as the *bhrātṛvya* and the *sapatna* has also been referred to earlier. If these associations had parallels in the human context, they would suggest that initially the *rājā* had little to do with the perpetuation or maintenance of a stratified, hierarchically ordered household.

The taking on of the latter role by the *rājā* therefore involved a fundamental change in the very nature of *rājya* itself. In other

words, not only was the support of the *gṛhapati* crucial for the *rājā*, but in the process of striving to obtain this support, the *rājā* took on new social roles and abandoned earlier ones. Thus, the *rājya* which emerged through the support of the *gṛhapati* was one in which the imprint of the latter was clearly visible.

– the critical element here is that the patriarchal rural/military caste Aryan "householder" - lauded "Varna" was socially and racially linked to the king; the king was a "householder" at the apex of the "Kshatriya system.

Chapter Nine

The End and the Beginning of Rājya

> In my *janapada* there is no thief, no miser, no drunkard, no man who has not installed the sacrificial fire, no ignorant man, no adulterer; how can there be an adulteress?
>
> Aśvapati Kaikeya

As is evident from the preceding discussion, the origin and development of the institution of *rājya* in north India (*c.* eighth to fourth centuries BC), and its acceptance, was a complex process. A number of more or less closely related developments provided the underpinning for the emergence of monarchy, and, at the same time, determined its nature. The brahmanical tradition probably evolved as an attempt to construct and enforce an understanding of these changes. Hence it was characterized by a certain fluidity, evident in myths, in the attributes ascribed to deities and the significance assigned to them. For instance, Varuṇa was initially conceived of as a typical *rājā*, while Indra and Prajāpati were regarded as *śreṣṭhas*. Yet it was the latter's attributes which were increasingly viewed as ideal for the human *rājā* in the later Vedic tradition and thereafter. At another level, a range of rituals, such as the *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha* and *vājapeya*, was developed which provided occasions for defining *rājya*. Besides, the values associated with these sacrifices were reinforced through domestic rituals and rites of passage. The attempt to devise and enforce non-ritual, universalistic prescriptions was interwoven with a changing definition of rulership and some of the circumstances underlying this change.

It is evident that changes in the brahmanical tradition relate to two inter-related developments—the emergence of a single, composite definition of political power and authority, typified in the virtually exclusive use of the term *rājā* for a man occupying the highest position in society, and growing interaction among relative-

ly independent communities, which resulted in increasing socio-economic differentiation both within and among them. The latter development provided the context for the former. The relationship between the two processes was dynamic, with each influencing and reinforcing the other in a variety of ways.

The development of a composite definition of rulership is exemplified in the existence of a number of terms indicative of leadership, such as *śreṣṭha*, *adhipati*, *virāj*, *svarāj* and *rājā*, which were assimilated into one another in the later Vedic tradition. In the process, some of the distinctive features of specific types of leadership were abandoned or marginalized, whereas others were accorded central importance.

To start with, the units or categories in terms of which the exercise of rulership was envisaged suggest a range of possibilities. The *śreṣṭha*, for instance, was conceived of as asserting dominance over his kinsfolk or equals. At the same time, an alternative possibility of limitless expansion was conceptualized through the characterization of Prajāpati, although its practical realization was clearly impossible. The incorporation of diverse definitions was probably a means of reconciling and synthesizing notions which had developed in the context of distinct communities. This possibility is strengthened when one considers the divergent economic and social roles ascribed to Indra and Prajāpati referred to earlier. Such a fusion was useful for men who were aspiring to establish contact with or assert control over more than one community, each associated with distinct norms or values.

Definitions of *ādhipatya* were also rather distinct, with the *adhipati* being conceived of as exercising control over social categories which were often defined in terms of *varṇa*. As opposed to this, *vairājya* was not associated with any notion of control or dominance. In the case of the *rājā*, a systematic attempt was made to increase the number of groups incorporated within his sphere of influence, apparent from variations in the formulae used to proclaim his status on ritual occasions such as the *rājasūya* or *aśvamedha*, which referred to the *rājā* in terms of a single *viś*, or, alternatively, numerous people. This is also implicit in the recognition accorded to the existence of different kinds of *viś*, as for

instance in the *pāriplava* cycle of the *aśvamedha* and in the attempt to identify the *rājā* with other kinds of rulers such as the *adhipati*, *virāj* and *svarāj* in rituals like the *aindramahābhiṣeka*. The use of each of these titles for a range of deities probably sacralized and by extension legitimized such assimilative tendencies.

In effect, a systematic effort was made to arrive at a single definition of rulership which was intrinsically linked to the consolidation of power. This in turn resulted in a marginalization of the attributes of *rājya* associated with deities such as Varuṇa and Soma, which were relatively less exploitative and more benevolent. Thus, the definition of *rājya* was transformed substantially, with earlier economic and social roles being abandoned or modified, while newer ones were recognized and legitimized at a variety of levels.

The process of extending and intensifying control was accompanied by a changing relationship with what were defined as the bases of material well-being—productive and procreative resources. This was typified in two related developments: on the one hand, the role of the ruler or chief in distribution, both conditional and unconditional, was regulated, if not negated, while on the other, the notion of the ruler as an exploiter was both elaborated and legitimized. These processes are evident in the context of *śraiṣṭhya*, where notions of generosity attributed to the divine *śreṣṭhas*, Indra and Prajāpati, were not extended to the human situation. What is more, the *soma* sacrifice, which legitimized *śraiṣṭhya*, was used as an occasion for appropriating resources from the community and for distributing them asymmetrically. This is reflected in the importance attached to *dakṣiṇā*, which accrued to the priests. While the giving of *dakṣiṇā* enabled the donor to convert material resources into social prestige, the transfer of wealth to the priest, who was under no social compulsion to part with it, contained possibilities for the concentration of wealth in the hands of a specific social category. As opposed to this, other participants in the ritual were probably entertained at a common feast and thus had no access to productive resources in the sacrificial context. This meant that the very process whereby *śraiṣṭhya* was legitimized reinforced socio-economic differentiation. As variations of the *soma* sacrifice were

surplus appropriation – redistribution – consumption

used to legitimize *ādhipatya* and *svārājya* and were incorporated within the rituals which legitimized *rājya*, a specific definition of the ruler's role in distributive processes was universalized. Besides, the fact that the sacrifices which legitimized *ādhipatya*, *svārājya* or *rājya* were more elaborate than the basic *soma* sacrifice meant that their performance would have had a greater social and economic impact than that of the relatively simple paradigmatic ritual.

At the same time, alternative possibilities of distribution, evident in the definition of *vairājya* or the conceptualization of the divine *rājā*, Soma, which emphasized unconditional, total, virtually self-effacing generosity, were either manipulated or absorbed within a new context, or negated, as were personnel involved in alternative patterns of distribution such as the *bhāgadugha*, who was probably responsible for distributing shares, and the *akṣāvāpa*, who was in charge of dicing and the consequent redistribution of wealth. The contrast is evident when one compares Soma *rājā*, regarded as food for his fellow divinities, with his human counterpart, the typical eater of the *viś*. In other words, the context within which people participating in different networks of distribution were brought together determined the asymmetrical division of resources at the expense of other, less exploitative patterns.

The development of a more exploitative relationship was justified, implicitly and occasionally explicitly, through the attempt to arrive at a single definition of cosmogonic processes, which were conceived of as providing the context for human existence. This definition related such processes to Prajāpati, who, more often than not, was thought to have created the universe through a sacrifice. The conceptualization of the sacrifice or specific types of rituals as cosmogonically significant meant, in effect, that the men who could perform or get such rituals performed were recognized as equal to Prajāpati, and thus divinized. Besides, they were thought to be responsible for ensuring general well-being, and could thus claim a share in it. Such associations were developed for the *śreṣṭha*, *adhipati*, *svarāj* and *rājā* on the human plane in the later Vedic tradition through assigning a cosmogonic significance to the *soma* sacrifice and rituals such as the *rājasūya*. This focus on the cos-

dicing = random distribution & excess surplus wealth -

mogonic sacrifice(s), moreover, resulted in the marginalization of alternative cosmogonic speculations, associated with Indra, who was conceived of as creating through his valour, Varuṇa, whose cosmogonic role was linked to *māyā*, and the *virāj* and Soma, who were associated with creation through heterosexual intercourse. The attempt to establish and reinforce the notion of a single form of cosmogonic activity meant that men who could mime it were accorded or could claim a unique socio-political status. As opposed to this, other men (and women) could be portrayed as less relevant to processes of production and could hence be legitimately denied access to resources or produce, or at least be deprived of a part of what they produced through less exalted means.

The reduction of the range of permissible cosmogonic speculation also meant that alternative understandings of cosmogonic processes were gradually rendered less available, and that the perceptions or values of some communities were probably marginalized. This in turn facilitated the homogenization and incorporation of different peoples within the scope of a single, all-encompassing political framework.

While the propagation of a specific cosmogonic understanding may have theoretically justified a claim to everything by those who could recreate cosmogonic acts, this was a possibility which could not be realized in practice. This is apparent from the focus on specific produce such as *paśu* or *anna* whose acquisition was emphasized for the *śreṣṭha* or the wider but none the less finite range of produce or resources claimed by the *rājā*. In practice, any attempt to claim the totality of produce or resources would have entailed the dispossession of the *viś* or common people, which was not envisaged as a possibility even within the ritual context. Here, while efforts were made to appropriate the resources of the *viś*, it was implicitly recognized that these could be counter-productive, evident in the fear that the *viś* might desert the *kṣatra*. The relative autonomy of the *vaiśya* is also implied by his characteristic prosperity which rested on an ability to control and channelize the flow of economic resources through networks of exchange, including trade, which were relatively independent of political or ritual

regulation. Hence, although the human *śreṣṭha*, *adhipati*, *svarāj* and *rājā* could potentially claim control over all productive resources, this was effectively limited by practical exigencies.

The consolidation of political authority was also accompanied by an attempt to regulate access to women who were increasingly defined as instruments of procreation. This definition was enforced through restrictions on the range of mythical speculation regarding procreation. This is evident in the marginalization of Varuṇa, a deity who was conceived of as less masculine, and the growing emphasis on the attributes of masculinity associated with Indra and Agni, the divine *śreṣṭha* and *adhipati* respectively. In other words, later Vedic mythology tended to define procreation as a male-dominated activity. More significantly, the treatment of women as instruments of procreation is evident in the importance assigned to non-physical processes, such as sacrifices, which were envisaged as procreative devices. This ritualization of procreation was effected through the use of *mithunas* or heterosexual pairs of objects, ideas, verses, etc. in the sacrifice, as well as through the creation of alternative, non-physical 'births' through initiation ceremonies before the sacrifice, and the *upanayana*, which broadly coincided with male puberty. Such ritualizations are evident both in the *soma* sacrifice as well as, with modifications, in the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha*, and in the domestic ritual.

As in the case of access to productive resources, the ritualization of procreation did not imply control over all women or all offspring. However, it constituted a basis for asserting the importance of the *yajamāna* who was thought to ensure procreation. Besides, it provided a means of cementing bonds amongst men of different social categories.

If the association that developed between the ruler and the material basis of society points to a tendency to focus on some possibilities to the exclusion of others, a similar tendency is discernible in the role envisaged for the ruler vis-à-vis socio-political issues. In a sense, the two were interwoven, as the attempts to claim resources or produce more or less exclusively were linked to their appropriation. This was probably resisted, and while such resistance could be crushed, this was a short-term solution. In the long run,

the search for or the creation of alternative bases of social support acquired importance. In the process, rulers tended to ally with specific social categories against others. In order to be concretized, such alliances required to be constantly worked out in terms of the sharing of power and/or resources.

There were three areas of social concern which had acquired significance. These related to *varṇa*, including inter-*varṇa* relations, as well as that of rulers vis-à-vis the order, the kinship structure, where there is evidence of conflict between patrilineal and non-patrilineal tendencies, and related to the above, gender stratification. The definition of the social role of the ruler, which coalesced different possibilities, rested on the support for a stratified social order in general, and of powerful social categories within that order in particular. At the same time, alternatives were abandoned or portrayed as disruptive. Once again, the norms or possibilities which were developed in the context of some communities were probably more privileged than were those of others.

Varṇa was one of the means of ordering social relations which acquired centrality during the later Vedic phase. While the hierarchy itself probably emerged as a result of differentiation within and amongst different communities, its development posed certain problems and opened up new possibilities for the leaders or rulers of such communities. Members of specific *varṇas* could, and evidently did, claim access to some forms of power—ritual in the case of the *brāhmaṇa* and economic in the case of the *vaiśya* and probably the *śūdra* as well. As a result, any attempt by the rulers to monopolize all forms of power was, in effect, constantly checked. At the same time, the emergence of such powerful social categories created the possibility of allying with them and provided the basis for developing new networks of support.

Both tendencies were incorporated within the brahmanical tradition. The former is evident, for instance, in the treatment of the term *kṣatra*. While it had connotations of universal power and was typically an attribute of virtually all categories of rulers, it was gradually restricted to mean a member of the second *varṇa*. The claims of the *kṣatriya* to universal power were thus curtailed. This restricted definition was then utilized in discussions on the role of

the ruler vis-à-vis the *brāhmaṇa* on the one hand and the *viś* or *vaiśya* on the other.

Each of these relationships was characterized by an inherent tension. For instance, both Indra and Varuṇa were conceived of as accepting the authority of deities representing the *brahma*, or of challenging them more or less effectively. At another level, the relative importance of the *brahma* and *kṣatra* or, more concretely, the *purohita* and the *rājā* were worked out more or less satisfactorily in rituals and prescriptions. The conflicts which were thus sought to be resolved originated from attempts to define separate spheres of influence by members of each of these categories and the practical difficulties of the process. Although the envisaged resolution was in favour of the priestly category, not surprizing given the brahmanical bias of our sources, there are indications that the *brāhmaṇa* may have accepted a degree of subordination, as he was dependent on the material and social support offered by the ruler. The latter in turn was dependent on the former for the performance of sacrifices, which provided occasions for acquiring resources, and for communicating information regarding the power and status of the ruler, simultaneously sacralizing such information. This was later extended to a dependence on the interventions of the priesthood in the household ritual, which communicated definitions of power and legitimized the authority of the *rājā* on a day-to-day basis.

The *kṣatra-viś* relationship underwent a more fundamental transformation. The relationship between Indra and the Maruts, regarded as representatives of the *kṣatra* and the *viś* respectively, was envisaged as harmonious in the early Vedic tradition but was perceived as visibly strained in the later Vedic context. This was accompanied by an attempt on the part of the *kṣatra* to systematically dominate the *viś* through a range of rituals such as the *soma* sacrifice, the *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha* and household sacrifices, and the centrality accorded to the notion of the *viś* as food for the *kṣatra*, which replaced the earlier claim of the former to a share of the spoils acquired by the latter. Simultaneously, and understandably enough, fears that the *viś* might desert the *kṣatra* were expressed repeatedly. Such tendencies were in a sense reflective of the transi-

tional situation outlined earlier, in which pre-existing intra-community bonds were subjected to considerable stress. Hence it is not surprizing to find that institutions such as the *vidatha*, which probably served to maintain these bonds, were virtually eliminated. As communities became increasingly differentiated, earlier, relatively egalitarian bonds between the leader and the followers gave way to a more complex network of political ties. On the one hand, prosperous members of the community, typified by the *grāmaṇī*, were accorded or assumed a significant role in political processes, enabling the *rājā* to acquire economic resources and prestige, whereas on the other hand, other members were subjected to more or less systematic exploitation.

What is also significant is that while the typical divine *rājās*, Varuṇa and Soma, were occasionally conceived of as protagonists in the *brahma-kṣatra* conflict, they were rarely associated with the *kṣatra-viś* relationship. On the other hand, Indra was accorded a role in both relationships in later Vedic mythology. It was the understanding associated with Indra, moreover, which was systematically reiterated in later Vedic rituals meant for human rulers such as the *adhipati*, *svarāj* and *rājā*, through the *soma* sacrifice and its variants. Thus, new possibilities were explored for the human *rājā* in the later Vedic context, possibilities which had little or no connection with the social role of the early Vedic *rājā* embedded in the conceptualization of Varuṇa and Soma.

The tendency to ascribe new roles to the human *rājā* is, if anything, even more striking in the context of the ties amongst kinsmen. Here there is evidence for two inter-related developments in the later Vedic tradition—one, a perception of kinsmen of the same generation, typified by the *bhrātṛvya* and *sapatna*, as rivals, from whom wealth and access to the ritual had to be ideally appropriated, and secondly, an attempt to reinforce patrilineal ties between father and son, as well as between the sacrificer and his *pitṛs* or patrilineal ancestors.

The first development resulted in a substantial reworking of early Vedic mythology, evident in the treatment of the Indra-Vṛtra conflict, and in the relatively novel notion of the *devas* and *asuras* as antagonistic. While Vṛtra was viewed as representative of un-

mitigated evil in the early Vedic tradition, the destruction of Vṛtra acquired a certain ambiguity in the later Vedic context. At the same time, the divine *rājā*, Soma, and, to a lesser extent, Varuṇa, were equated explicitly or implicitly with Vṛtra. At another level, later Vedic rituals constantly equated the killing of Vṛtra or the *asuras* with the destruction of the *bhrātṛvya* or *sapatna*. This was, moreover, recognized as a legitimate goal in rituals ranging from the *soma* sacrifice to the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha*, and domestic rituals. As such, it is evident that the assertion of control over kinsmen of the same generation was an integral part of the definition of rulership which was emerging. That such assertions were none the less regarded as ambivalent was probably owing to the tensions inherent in the destruction or devaluation of certain kinship ties, at one level, and of the destruction or marginalization of the values associated with the early *rājā* at another. Clearly, the process could not be viewed or portrayed as entirely beneficial.

It is likely that the ties amongst kinsmen of the same generation were based on reciprocity or the sharing of resources. As opposed to this, patrilineal ties, which were positively valorized through later Vedic myths such as those associated with Prajāpati, the divine *śreṣṭha*, and rituals, permitted the consolidation of resources and, by extension, power, through their transfer from one generation to the next. Hence, it is not surprizing that such connections were reiterated on a number of ritual occasions. These emphasized the father-son bond as one of mutual support in different stages of the life-cycle. Once again, the role of Varuṇa and Soma was marginal, if not negative, in such conceptualizations—Varuṇa was, in fact, known by the metronymic Āditya, whereas Soma was only occasionally conceived of in patrilineal terms. This probably indicates that the early Vedic *rājā* was less dependent on patriliny for claiming access to power or social support.

The concern with patriliny, as well as the definition of women as procreative resources, was accompanied by the beginning of systematic attempts to structure gender relations. While some of these possibilities were explored even in early Vedic mythology, typified by the Indra-Uṣas conflict, these were elaborated substantially in the later Vedic tradition, where myths associated with

Prajāpati laid the basis for differentiating between the sexes, while rituals and prescriptions delineated the ideal nature of gender relations at length. The definition of women as weak and passive was evolved and underscored. This was then extended to the notion of women as objects to be given and received, accompanied by attempts to restrict their participation in non-procreative activities, and a denial of the exercise of political power by women. The relationship envisaged as ideal is typified in the use of the wives of the *rājā* as instruments of procreation in the *aśvamedha*, for instance, and in the simultaneous marginalization of goddesses such as Aditi and Vāc, who were conceived of as associated with *rājās* or as exercising power as *rājñīs* or *rāṣṭrīs* in the early Vedic tradition. The divine *rājās* were rarely associated with gender stratification, which was thus, once again, a relatively new role ascribed to the later Vedic *rājā*. All of these were encapsulated in the notion of the *rājā* as the upholder of *varṇāśrama dharma*. As we have seen, this meant, in effect, the regulation of the access of men belonging to different *varṇas* to the sacred, and safeguarding the access of men to property and women.

The ascription of a new social role was not peculiar to the *rājā* but extended to the *adhipati* and the *svarāj* as well. The deities associated with such titles, such as Agni, had little or no intrinsic role in the issues which were acquiring centrality. However, the use of variations of the *soma* sacrifice for legitimization by those who aspired to such positions on the human plane meant that a specific understanding of *varṇa* and kinship relationships was enforced and universalized. As opposed to this, *vairājya*, which was based on notions diametrically opposed to hierarchy, including possibilities of gender-neutral access to distributive or benevolent power, was marginalized.

The social role envisaged for the ruler required a range of supportive mechanisms for its implementation. These included access to productive resources or produce, to mechanisms of coercion, and to means of communication and legitimization. Not surprizingly, the extent to which such mechanisms developed varied considerably. While the rudiments of supportive institutions are discernible in the case of the *śreṣṭha*, these were developed at length

in the context of *rājya*. The *adhipati*, *virāj* and *svarāj* were not associated with such developments. This was probably due to the fact that the social role envisaged for the *adhipati* and *svarāj* was an artificial extension of that of the *śreṣṭha*, whereas that of the *virāj* was distinctive and non-hierarchical, and probably rested on different mechanisms of support which did not survive in an increasingly stratified social context. The *rājā*'s position was somewhat paradoxical—on the one hand, the social role of the later Vedic *rājā* was clearly distinct from that of his early Vedic counterpart. At the same time, the notions of benevolent sacrality associated with the divine *rājās* probably provided the basis for developing new mechanisms of support in general, and legitimization in particular, to an extent which was not possible in the context of *śraiṣṭhya*.

The differences amongst the categories referred to above become evident from an examination of the resources claimed and the basis on which such claims were justified. These included *bali*, which was claimed by both the *śreṣṭha* and the *rājā*. This was probably initially demanded in the sacrificial context or as hospitality. Both the periodicity and the amount of the demand were left vague, and were in all likelihood determined on specific occasions after taking into consideration the relative strength of the *kṣatra* and the *viś*.

Hospitality or *ātithya* was particularly important for the *rājā* and provided a means of obtaining access to the resources of the household. Such occasions were probably valued for non- economic reasons as well, providing, as they did, an opportunity for establishing direct contact between the ruler and his subjects.

Although divine *adhipatis* or their associates were conceived of as receiving a *bhāga* or share in lieu of protection, their human counterpart could not claim such a share. This was probably because the social role of the human *adhipati* was unlike that of his divine counterpart. The human *rājā*, on the other hand, could and did claim a *bhāga*, often defined as one-sixth of the produce, which was justified on the basis of protection. Thus different forms of tribute which were probably initially associated with different possibilities of leadership, were gradually coalesced and consolidated within the

framework of *rājya*. This was accompanied by the development and systematization of relationships with the *purohita* in particular, and the priesthood in general, and the *grāmaṇī*, and, to a lesser extent, the *sūta*. They evidently helped in the appropriation of resources, either directly, as in the case of the *grāmaṇī* or the *sūta*, or indirectly, by creating ritual occasions for appropriation, or justifying appropriative relationships, as in the case of the priests.

A broadly similar tendency is evident in the development of coercive mechanisms, which were often conceived of as appropriative devices. Although the divine *śreṣṭha*, Indra, was typically associated with the *vajra* which he was thought to have used against Vṛtra, and which ought to have been available against the *bhrātṛvya* and *sapatna* in the human context, the human *śreṣṭha* was evidently unable to develop effective means of coercion. On the other hand, the human *rājā*, despite his association with non-militaristic deities like Varuṇa and Soma, was able to develop such mechanisms, typified by his connection with the *senānī* and the chariot. Access to such mechanisms was very often explicitly linked to an ability to appropriate resources. Almost simultaneously, the *rājā* was expected to uphold social norms by coercing those who defied them through the use of the *daṇḍa*. Although the ability to administer the *daṇḍa* was only beginning to be asserted during the period under consideration, the claim to use it rested on the understanding of the *rājā* as righteous, and was valuable in legitimizing his position.

Equally important was the development of mechanisms of communication which could diffuse notions regarding the legitimacy of the exercise of power by the *śreṣṭha* or the *rājā*. Those available to the *śreṣṭha* were relatively limited, consisting basically of the *soma* sacrifice which provided an occasion for explicating the values and norms associated with *śraiṣṭhya*. For the *rājā*, on the other hand, connections could be established through the *sūtas* who probably mediated between the *viś* and the *rājā* and popularized the institution of *rājya*, and priests, who not only created the elaborate ritual context of the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha* which demonstrated the *rājā*'s power through a range of visual and aural symbols, but, by

penetrating within the household and establishing a bond between the *gṛhapati* and the *rājā*, permitted the legitimization of *rājya* on a day-to-day basis.

As is implicit from the above, the means whereby positions of status were legitimized varied considerably. Questions of legitimization were evidently unimportant in the early Vedic tradition, where the differences between the leaders and led were probably relatively less sharp. Even in the later Vedic tradition, the problem of legitimization did not arise in the context of *vairājya*, which is not surprizing, as the *virāj* was not conceived of as asserting dominance or control over others. However, legitimization was of crucial significance for the *śreṣṭha* and, to a lesser extent, for the *adhipati* and the *svarāj*. It also became an issue of central importance for the new *rājā*, who was assuming a partisan role in a situation of social differentiation, and hence had to justify his claims to power more explicitly.

A number of means of legitimization were explored. These included myths which discussed the possibilities of a god acquiring the position of *śreṣṭha* or *rājā* through a contract or through the performance of a ritual. In the human context, however, only the latter possibility was developed systematically. The sacrifices which were considered useful ranged from the relatively simple *soma* sacrifice prescribed for the *śreṣṭha* to its variants, prescribed for the *adhipati* and the *svarāj*, to elaborate rituals such as the *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha* and the *vājapeya*. The tendency to devise complex rituals permitted the incorporation of diverse practices, as in the case of the *rājasūya*. These included the ritualization of contests such as chariot-racing and dicing. This was probably a means of ensuring wider support, as members of different communities could identify with the *rājā* who followed their traditions. However, at another level, the focus on complex rituals restricted the number of men who could compete for positions of status, as each performance presupposed access to resources and personnel which would have been beyond the reach of most men.

Such rituals provided an occasion for communicating and sanctifying values related to the new socio-political order. Nevertheless, their success was conditional on the participation of the

rituals become inclusive as rāja sought to be "all things to all men" and incorporate

populace, and this may have been increasingly difficult to ensure in a situation of growing social differentiation and where attempts were being made to widen the sphere of control.

It was in this context that systematic efforts were made to incorporate values considered crucial for the new definition of *rājya* in particular, within the framework of household rituals. This was attempted both through routine sacrifices such as the *agnihotra* and new and full moon sacrifice as well as through rites of passage such as the *upanayana* and marriage, in which the *gṛhapati* or male head of the household or his son was implicitly or explicitly equated with the divine or human *rājā*. This meant that the norms associated with *rājya* could be reiterated virtually continuously.

The incorporation of the notion of *rājya* within the household was related to changes in the context within which the institution emerged. I had focused on the two most significant aspects of this context, the development of the *varṇa*-based order, and the consolidation of a particular form of household organization, the *gṛha*. The former attempted to both describe and control social differentiation in terms of the emergence of a definite, delimited, priestly category, and groups which were able to develop and control forms of production, including agriculture, cattle-rearing, crafts and exchange, typified by the development of trade. While socio-economic differentiation made it difficult to ensure the participation of all these categories in common rituals such as the *rājasūya*, it also rendered at least some members of each category more willing to turn to political leaders in order to ensure support for their specific social, economic or ritual interests. This was especially important in a situation where definitions of the exclusive interest of each category were contested, and where attempts to consolidate and protect such definitions proved problematic, as is evident from the efforts of the priesthood to regulate access to sacrality. While the priesthood tried to counter challenges by brahmanizing a range of beliefs and practices, the fact that this was a never-ending process points to the limitations of this strategy. Thus, while their claims to ritual or sacral power were becoming important, they were, at the same time, increasingly dependent on external support for the maintenance and consolidation of such claims. In other words, a

new, differentiated support base was potentially available to the *rājā*. This was probably consolidated by the recognition accorded to the interests of such categories through the administration of *daṇḍa*, which was weighted in favour of some social categories against others.

At the same time, the attempts to consolidate the connections between the *rājā* and a differentiated social order focused on new bonds—those between the *rājā* and the *gṛhapati*. The creation and maintenance of these bonds was related to the development of the notion of a single household type, the *gṛha*, as the ideal. The *gṛha* was characterized by patriarchal control, exercised over the procreative powers of the wife, and over productive resources, which were ideally transferred from father to son(s). The establishment of the kinship bonds specific to the *gṛha*, that is, the hierarchically ordered relations between the *pati* and *patnī* or *bhāryā* and supportive ties between father and son was accompanied by the marginalization or negation of ties with kinswomen other than the wife. This reorganization of kinship ties, which permitted the consolidation of resources, was buttressed by a range of sacral devices used to socialize kinsmen and women into specific roles. Men (especially fathers and sons) were connected with notions of power through attempts to identify them with divine or human *rājās*, while women were confined to what was defined as their only legitimate role, as instruments of procreation within the context of the *gṛha*. The privileging of the *gṛha* as opposed to a range of other forms of household organisation was probably politically valuable, as it was based on a concentration of power in the hands of a single man, with whom negotiations and interaction may have been easier from the point of view of the priest or the *rājā*. Besides, the fact that the position of the *gṛhapati* rested on internalizing notions of superordination and subordination facilitated the legitimization of the new definition of political power which was emerging through analogies between the position and functions of the *gṛhapati-yajamāna* and that of the *rājā* which were often explicitly worked out.

Nevertheless, the attempt to structure kinship ties was resisted, and in such a situation, while the *gṛhapati* was potentially powerful, he required the support of priests and rulers to actualize his power.

Thus, ideological and material bonds were forged between the householder, on the one hand, and the *brāhmaṇa* and the *rājā* on the other, evidenced in the attempt to brahmanize domestic rituals and use these as occasions for communicating values conducive to the maintenance of *rājya* and *gārhasthya*, and in the giving of *dakṣiṇā*, *dāna*, *bali* and *ātithya* or hospitality by the *gṛhapati*.

As suggested earlier, the fact that the later Vedic *rājā*, unlike his early Vedic counterpart, functioned increasingly within the context of a differentiated social order, resulted in a fundamental transformation in the very nature of *rājya*. This is evident when one compares the social roles ascribed to divinities such as Varuṇa and Soma with those associated with the human *rājā* in the later Vedic tradition and subsequently. The former were concerned with upholding *ṛta*, a universal, holistic order, whereas the latter were regarded as upholders of *dharma*. What is more, the specific aspects of *dharma* which were to be maintained were related to the concerns of *varṇa* and *āśrama*. Even within the framework of *varṇa* and *āśrama*, moreover, only certain aspects, regulating access to the domain of the sacred, which was particularly important for communicating values central to *rājya* and legitimizing them and the rights to property and women, were focused on, to the exclusion of a range of other possible concerns. Thus, the very process whereby the later Vedic *rājā* was thought to acquire support and gain acceptance was characterized by a shift away from the earlier preoccupation with universal, undifferentiated, benevolence.

Although the content of the term *rājā* thus changed substantially, the term itself was retained. This was probably owing to the fact that its earliest connotations were useful in disguising and hence legitimizing, the transformation which had taken place. This is reflected in later Vedic mythology and rituals, where the attributes associated with Varuṇa and Soma were modified or absorbed rather than explicitly negated.

The definition of *rājya* which developed in the later Vedic context and thereafter, proved influential even in later situations. This is probably because this definition linked an apparently beneficial *rājā* with both the concerns of the dominant social categories which had emerged within a stratified society, as well as with those

of the dominated. While the former link was more real than the latter, the insistence on both connections ensured that *rājya* gained widespread acceptance. Nevertheless, the connections could not be taken for granted, nor were they established once and for all. Thus, the maintenance of both the *rājā* and the social order on which he depended had to be ensured through the virtually continuous re-iteration of what were perceived or portrayed as shared concerns.

Table I
The components of the pāriplava cycle

Viś	*Category Represented*	*Deity*	*Lore*
Gṛhamedhins	Manuṣyas	Manu Vaivasvata	Ṛg Veda
Sthaviras	Pitṛs	Yama Vaivasvata	Yajur Veda
Yuvāna śobhanā	Gandharvas	Varuṇa Āditya	Atharva Veda
Yuvatayaḥ śobhanā	Apsaras	Soma Vaiśvānara	Angīrasa vidyā
Sarpas, sarpavids	Sarpa	Arbuda Kādraveya	Sarpa vidyā
Selagas, pāpakṛts	Rakṣas	Kuvera Vaiśravaṇa	Rakṣovidyā, devajana vidyā
Kusīdins	Asuras	Asita Dhānvan	Māyā
Matsya, matsyahantṛ	Udakacara	Matsya Sāmmada	Itihāsa
Brahmacārins, vayāṃsī	vayovids	Vayāṃsī	Tārkṣya Vaipśyata
Śrotriyas	Devas	Dharma Indra	Sāma Veda

Table II
The Ratnīnāmhavīṃśi

Ratnins	*Deities Associated With Them*
senānī (6)	Agni
purohita (brāhmaṇa 1)	Bṛhaspati
yajamāna (rājanya 2)	Indra
mahiṣī (3)	Aditi
vāvātā (4)	Bhagā
parivṛktṛ (5)	Niṛṛti
sūta (7)	Varuṇa
grāmaṇī (8)	Maruts
kṣattṛ (9)	Savitṛ
samgrahitṛ (10)	Aśvins
bhāgadugha (11)	Pūṣan
akṣāvāpa (12)	Rudra
govikartṛ	
pālāgala	

Based on the white Yajur Vedic tradition. Variations and ranking in the black Yajur Vedic tradition indicated in brackets.

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This work would be guided by 2 factors:

1. a chronology (with examples) to illustrate the development of rājya

2. analysis of the great heterodox movement - Buddhism which clearly dominated social and religious life in the period 400 BC onwards to 200 A.D.

Kumkum Roy studied History in Presidency College, Calcutta. She specialized in Ancient Indian History from the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She teaches History in Satyawati Co-educational College, University of Delhi. She is interested in political ideas and institutions, as well as issues of gender in early India. She has published a number of papers on these themes.

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